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WILD WEST WEEKLY

A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE.

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NEW YORK, MARCH 31, 1905.

Price 5 Cents.

YOUNG WILD WEST AND THE BLAZED TRAIL; OR, ARIETTA AS A SCOUT. *By AN OLD SCOUT.*



While the four men were intent upon the game of cards, Arietta knelt beside Wild and severed his bonds. No one saw what was going on, for the guard was now fast asleep.
"Hand me that rifle!" whispered the boy.

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NEW YORK, MARCH 31, 1905.

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Young Wild West and the Blazed Trail;

OR,

ARIETTA AS A SCOUT.

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CHAPTER I.

THE CAMP ON THE BANK OF THE LITTLE COLORADO.

On the banks of the river known as the Little Colorado, in the northern part of the territory of Arizona, a party of eight were just going into camp.

The sun was sinking low in the west, and as the day had been a hot one, the travelers seemed to be much relieved when they got in the shade of the trees that lined the bank of the stream at that point.

At the time of which we write this particular portion was in a very wild and unsettled state.

While gold and silver mining were carried on to quite an extent in various parts of the territory, there were parts of it where the foot of the white man had never trod.

And the trails that led over the arid plains and picturesque mountains were dangerous to travel, too, since lawless bands of white men and treacherous Indians were apt to be met with along them at almost any time.

The party of travelers we have just mentioned was a well-equipped one, as might have been seen as the two pack-horses were being unloaded of the camping outfit and necessities for a jaunt through such a wild and dangerous country.

But when we say that there were three females in it the reader will understand that the equipments should consist of more than a party of male travelers would be apt to have.

Two girls of seventeen or eighteen, a lady of perhaps twenty-five, two young fellows of twenty, a man of thirty and two Chinamen. That constituted the party.

The leader was no other than Young Wild West, the dashing young Prince of the Saddle and acknowledged Champion Deadshot of the West, a boy who has figured in

more daring adventures and hairbreadth escapes than has been the lot of many a man of the West three times his age.

Of the average height and weight, built after the fashion of a trained athlete, with muscles like iron and the agility of a cat, Young Wild West could cope with any foe that came along, and his quickness, great skill and coolness always made him come out the winner.

As we find him on the banks of the Little Colorado on this particular evening he was attired in a fancy hunting-suit of buckskin, blue silk shirt, light-hued sombrero and riding-boots. A belt was about the supple waist of the boy, and in this could be seen a brace of revolvers and a keen-edged hunting-knife, while over his shoulder hung a Winchester repeating rifle of the latest model of the day.

His handsome face, dark brown eyes and wealth of chestnut hair that hung over his shoulders gave him every appearance of being all we have described him to be, and as he removed the saddle and bridle from the splendid sorrel stallion he had just dismounted from, there was ease and grace in his every movement.

Cheyenne Charlie was the man of the party. He was a trifle over six feet tall, straight as an arrow, and as he was an ex-government scout and Indian fighter, he had surely been through the "mill," to use the expression.

He was attired in a style similar to Young Wild West, and his long black hair and mustache gave him what might be called a distinguished look.

Jim Dart was the other boy. He was about the same age as our hero, was well built and very active looking, and, having been born and reared on the border, was used to all sorts of dangers.

These three were partners—not only in gold mining, but in every-day life, for they were almost inseparable compan-

ions and liked one another as well as three brothers might have done.

Though Cheyenne Charlie was ten years older than either of the boys, he always looked to Young Wild West for advice upon all things. Some are born to be leaders, and Young Wild West was certainly one of them.

The young ladies with them—or girls, as they always called them—were Anna, the wife of Cheyenne Charlie, Arietta Murdock, the pretty golden-haired sweetheart of Young Wild West, and Eloise Gardner, a rather delicate brunette, who some day hoped to become the better half of Jim Dart.

The two Chinamen we have mentioned were the servants our friends had brought with them.

They were brothers and bore the names of Wing Wah and Hop Wah, respectively.

Both had proved themselves of more than ordinary use to the party many times.

However, it might be hinted right here that Hop Wah was a fellow who needed watching sometimes.

He was a confirmed gambler, and once in awhile he would take a notion to steal something that was of no use to him and then lie out of it, even if it was found in his possession.

There was a whole lot that was comical about the two brothers from the Flowery Kingdom, and this added to their interest to the party.

Young Wild West and his friends had left the ranch in the southern part of the territory they had been making their headquarters at for a trip to the North.

They had two reasons in making the trip. One was to hunt for adventure and the other was to look for gold.

As they were well used to the saddle and had excellent horses, they had covered a good many miles during the last five days.

They had found plenty of game as they came along and enjoyed the sport of shooting it.

But Arizona is not overrun with game in some parts of it.

In some places vegetation scarcely exists, much less game.

Deserts of alkali dust are numerous, and upon them nothing will grow but a burning thirst and a desire for something green and growing from the weary pilgrim who crosses them.

But on the banks of the big rivers of the territory everything flourished.

The grass was of the best for food for cattle and horses, and the semi-tropical trees, shrubs and wild flowers were in abundance.

A more pleasant spot to camp could hardly have been found on the face of this green earth than that selected by Young Wild West and his friends.

Cool and inviting, with the fragrance of the wild flowers filling the air and the murmur of the waters of the Little Colorado to make music for those who cared to listen as it flowed along to the northwest, only to empty into the big stream it had taken its name from, the spot was what might be called entrancing by some.

But our friends were used to seeing all sorts of beautiful spots throughout the great wilderness of the West, so they looked more for the comfort the place would afford than they did to its beauty.

"I guess this is about as good a place as we can find," Young Wild West had remarked as he called a halt. "There is everything here that we want, and that group of rocks there would afford an excellent shelter in case we are attacked before morning."

"Right you are, Wild!" Cheyenne Charlie retorted, so then they dismounted.

The two Chinamen had thrown off all signs of laziness now, and they unloaded the two pack-horses in no time and then began putting up two tents in the places Wild selected for them.

As soon as the horses had been fixed so they could help themselves to the bountiful feast nature had provided for them, Wild and his two partners started in to help get the camp in shape.

When they all got at it the task was completed in a very short time.

The girls in their neat hunting-skirts of buckskin and bright-colored waists looked charming enough as they flitted about in the preparations for supper.

Jim Dart soon started a fire for them and then Wing Wah, who was the cook, really started in.

But the girls liked to help Wing with his duties sometimes, and he was always pleased when they did.

They had a good supply of venison that had been salted and smoked on the way, and also a couple of haunches from a deer that had been shot at daylight that morning by Cheyenne Charlie, which was just fit to eat now.

While the Chinaman was preparing the meat for broiling Anna busied herself with making some corn-cakes which she intended to bake in the frying-pans they had, turning them over occasionally to prevent their burning.

Anna was an adept at making corn-cakes, and her husband's mouth began to water when he saw what she was up to.

"Don't forget to make plenty, Anna," he said. "I'm mighty hungry somehow."

"As if you were ever anything else when mealtime came around," laughed his wife. "Well, I will make enough, I assure you."

Some potatoes were already on the coals undergoing a roasting, so when the corn-cakes were ready to go on the fire all that was needed was the coffee to be put on and the venison steaks to be broiled.

But this part was quite easy, and with all giving a hand over the big fire when it had burned down so there was a big space of glowing coals, it was easy to get supper ready.

While the water they got from the river was not of the clearest, it was as good as they could expect to find in that region, so they simply made the best of it.

When the coffee was made of it the difference could not be told, anyhow.

Their supper was eaten with more than ordinary relish

that night, and when it was over and Cheyenne Charlie had lighted his pipe, he turned to his two young partners and said:

"Boys, I never enjoyed a better meal than that was in my whole life."

"Well, if we always get as good we will have no cause to complain," answered Wild.

"We don't always have the chance, though," spoke up Jim Dart.

"Oh, no! I mean when we do get the chance, of course. Quite often we have had to go without anything for a supper. But that has always been when danger was afloat. Just now everything seems to be as smooth as a pine board. It's funny! But I soon get tired of it when things run along too smoothly. There is nothing like a little excitement now and then."

"We ain't found much since we left ther ranch, but we'll have plenty of it afore we git much further, I reckon," observed the scout. "Hello! Here comes somebody!"

He arose to his feet as he spoke, and, following his gaze, Wild and the rest saw half a dozen rough-looking men riding along the river bank toward them.

They came from the north, too, showing that they had been where our party of friends was heading for.

Mounted on rusty-looking ponies and being dirty and ragged themselves, the men did not look very prepossessing.

They did not halt until they got right to the camp, and then in a free-and-easy way the man, who acted as though he was their leader, observed:

"Are we too late fur supper?"

Young Wild West had been looking them over quickly with his practiced eye, and he had come to the conclusion that they were a bad lot.

As they had cooking utensils with them and the carcass of a buck was thrown over one of the ponies behind the rider, he thought they were capable of getting their own supper.

"Yes, you are too late for supper," he answered. "Our fire has about gone out, and we don't care about starting it up again just now."

"Well, s'pose we start it up? I reckon you've got better grub than what we have. We like a good meal once in awhile as well as you do."

He looked at the girls as he said this and grinned as though he had said a very smart thing.

"Why can't them young ladies cook supper fur us?" spoke up one of the others, as he got off his horse. "I reckon no gal is too good ter cook grub fur a tired man."

"See here, my friend," said Young Wild West, calmly, "you take my advice and cook your own grub. There are plenty of places along the river as good as this, and you had better go and find one before it gets dark."

"I reckon this place right here is good enough fur us," exclaimed the spokesman of the party. "We're goin' ter take possession here, an' if you fellers don't like it you kin git out!"

"We are not in the habit of doing things that way."

"I reckon not!" spoke up Cheyenne Charlie. "It will take a bigger gang of measly coyotes than you are to make us git away from here!"

"It will, hey?" and the man drew a revolver from his belt.

Then something happened!

CHAPTER II.

THE BLAZED TRAIL.

There were just six in the gang that had stopped at the camp of Young Wild West, and it is safe to say that never were there six more surprised mortals than they were when the leader drew a revolver and acted threateningly.

He had barely got the shooter from the holster when there was a sharp report and it dropped from his hand.

Young Wild West stood before him, a smile on his face and a smoking revolver in his hand.

The bullet had simply grazed the elbow of the rascal, but it had acted like an electric shock on him, and for the space of thirty seconds he was paralyzed.

It had happened so quick that his five companions did not know exactly how it was done.

"You have just got thirty seconds to get out of my sight," said Young Wild West, coolly. "If I am able to see any of you at the end of that time I will shoot to kill! Now, be off with you!"

"What's ther matter, young feller?" spoke up the man who had suggested that the girls would do the cooking for them, as he recovered from his astonishment. "We don't mean——"

Crack!

Again Young Wild West's revolver spoke, and with a howl of pain the man clapped his hand to the side of his head.

This time the boy had grazed an ear, and he smiled as though it was all simply play.

Two of the others turned their horses and made from the spot at a gallop.

The fellow who had been stung last got into the saddle as quick as he had ever done before in his life, and then they all followed like so many frightened curs.

They got around a bluff in a hurry, and then the revolver still in his hand, our hero walked in the direction they had disappeared.

He heard the hoofbeats cease at that very moment, and then he knew the villains had come to a halt.

As fearlessly as though he was going to meet some friends, he walked around the bend and found the six horse-men at a standstill looking toward him.

"What is the matter?" he asked, coolly. "Are you looking for fight? If you are, why don't you start in? I'll bet there isn't a man among you who dares to pull a shooter!"

There was a deathly silence for a moment.

Not one of them made a move to draw a weapon.

It was quite evident that they had not expected to be followed, so again they had received a surprise.

"You can't take a joke, it seems," the leader finally said.

"Oh, yes I can! I like a joke now and then. You don't mean to say, though, that you were joking when you said you were going to stop in our camp?"

"Yes, I only said it for fun."

"Oh!"

"We wouldn't do anything ag'in you folks."

"You wouldn't, eh?"

"No. We're honest men, we are."

"Your appearance deceives you, then."

"We can't help how we look. We've had a rough time of it fur ther last month or two."

"Where do you hail from, anyhow?" asked Young Wild West.

"From a place that no one knows about 'cept them that lives there," was the reply.

"Ah! Is it a very big place?"

"Quite a village, I reckon."

"Well, I would advise you to go back there and stay there."

"We're goin' to ther nearest town ter buy some things we can't git there."

"Oh, well, go on, then. But be careful that you don't interfere with us again. If you do you will never get back to the village you spoke of."

"We are goin' right on about our business, but we've got ter ride past your camp."

"That is all right. We will allow you to do that."

Wild now stepped back until he was around the bend out of their sight and then hurried back to the camp.

He had scarcely got there when the six horsemen appeared.

They were very meek now and, two abreast, they rode past the camp and followed the bank of the river.

As they got past the leader called out, as he brought his horse to a halt:

"Say! who are you, young feller?"

"Young Wild West is my name," the boy replied.

"All right. My name is Sandy Ike. Jest remember it, won't yer?"

With that he rode off in a hurry, dodging as though he expected a shot to be fired at him.

But Young Wild West simply laughed.

"He thinks he impressed us by telling who he was," he observed. "Well, I think those fellows are about as cowardly a lot of villains as I have seen in some time. They intended to have things all their own way, and there is no telling how far they would have gone if they had been allowed to go ahead."

"They're a bad lot," replied Cheyenne Charlie. "They ain't ther sort as would do a feller much harm when he was lookin' at 'em, but would do it behind his back quick enough."

"That's right, Charlie," nodded Jim Dart; "you have got that down all right."

"They were a very evil-looking lot, I must say," spoke up Eloise.

"They soon found out that they couldn't do as they liked here, anyway," said Arietta, tossing her golden locks and looking proudly at her young lover. "Wild taught them something that they won't be apt to forget very soon, I will wager!"

"Well, if it wasn't for Wild's cool way of doing things we would never dare to travel around the country like we do," observed Anna. "There's Charlie! He knows how to fight, and he does fight whenever it is necessary; but he hasn't got the coolness he ought to have. Why, I believe if he had had his way when that fellow drew his revolver he would have shot him dead."

"And then the rest of them would have fired," remarked Arietta. "There would have been a lively time then."

"Yes, but Wild simply took all the fight out of them when he shot the revolver out of the man's hand. They were so astonished at the shot that they did not know what to do."

"Well, never mind," said Wild, with a laugh. "I have an easy way of doing business with such fellows as they are, and I find it is the best way, too."

"There ain't a man or boy livin' what kin jerk out a revolver an' fire it as quick as you kin, Wild," declared Cheyenne Charlie. "I've seen you do it about a hundred times, I reckon, but every time it seems wonderful to me."

"And he always makes the bullet go just where he wants it to—that's the best part of it," added Jim Dart.

It was now quite dark, so they set about arranging a guard for the night.

Wild thought it just possible that the six villains might come back and look for revenge, though he had an idea that they were really heading for a town, as they had stated.

But if they were, the words of their leader certainly implied that they were going back to the place that no one knew about except those who lived there.

Our friends believed in retiring early and rising at day-break.

So about eight o'clock the girls repaired to the tent they occupied and soon after that all but Jim and Hop Wah, who were to stand watch for the first two hours, went in the other tent.

Soon the camp was wrapped in silence, save the occasional tread of the guards as they made the rounds of the place.

Nothing occurred to disturb them, and when their time was up Jim and Hop awoke Charlie and Wing to relieve them and turned in.

The two latter ones were to stand three hours this night, and Wild was to take the last watch alone.

But it turned out that it was not necessary to keep a watch at all, for nothing happened during the night.

Shortly after daylight all were up and stirring.

Jim took a walk around the camp and reported everything all right, and then they proceeded to get breakfast.

As they were in no particular hurry, they took their time about it, and thus enjoyed the meal all the more.

"Well, what are we goin' to do, Wild, foller ther river for a ways?" asked the scout, as they were ready to set out.

"Yes, I think so. I have an idea that it would be a good thing for us to hunt up the place the fellow who called himself Sandy Ike spoke of. I rather think he was telling the truth when he said he hailed from a place that no one knows about except those who live there. If the inhabitants are anything like him and his crowd it must be a red-hot place."

"Well, we started out with no particular destination in view—suppose we follow the trail the six men made, then?" Jim Dart suggested.

"We kin foller it as far as it shows up," said the scout. "A rain would wipe it out in no time, you know."

"Well, come on!" exclaimed Young Wild West. "We are looking for gold and adventure. The chances are that we may find a little of both before this trip is over. If we don't it will be the first time we have failed to, anyway."

They all mounted, and with our hero and his pretty sweetheart in the lead they started in the direction the six villains had come from the night before.

The trail was plain enough.

It led along the river bank for perhaps a mile, and then suddenly turned off almost due west.

Right here our hero suddenly reined in his horse.

"I guess we won't have any trouble in getting to the place where the rascals came from," he said, pointing to the trunk of a tree near him. "It is a blazed trail!"

"As sure as you live it is!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie, as he looked at the tree and saw a white spot where a piece of the bark had been cut off.

"And there is another one over there!" spoke up Arietta, pointing to a tree about fifty feet distant that bore the marks of a hatchet.

"Those fellows must have thought it would be hard to find their way back," observed Jim Dart, "or they would never have taken all this trouble."

"Oh, it wasn't sich an awful lot of trouble, I reckon," retorted Charlie. "A feller could ride along with a hatchet in his hand an' clip off a piece of bark easy enough, an' without stoppin', too. That's ther way it has been done; you kin see that. They wasn't ridin' so very fast, though."

"Yes, that's the way it has been done," nodded Wild. "It seems to me that they must have had some end in doing it, too, and that makes me all the more anxious to follow the blazed trail."

All hands were interested now, even to the Chinamen.

"Velly funny, so be," remarked Wing. "Bad Melican men no find ee way back without markee flees."

"Allee samee mandarin in China," spoke up his brother. "He tie long ropee to um door, so when he go out to saloon on corner and gittee drunk, allee samee boiled owl, he find ee um way back. Gleet scheme, so be!"

This caused a smile all around.

Hop had a way of getting off funny remarks sometimes, and nothing was very strange, according to his way of taking it. He always knew of something similar, somehow.

As our friends rode along they found that the marks on the trees continued to show here and there, so they were now satisfied that the six men had really blazed the trees so they would be able to find their way back.

Up hill and down dale they rode, but it was a vast wilderness that they were traversing, and when noon came they were fortunate enough to find a place to stop at near a trickling mountain stream.

There were evidences of a fire here, showing that the villains they had met must have stopped there the night before.

As they did not know what sort of country they would be compelled to go through before they reached the end of the blazed trail, our friends did not let their stock of meat diminish any.

They had plenty of salt with them, and what game they shot they either dried, smoked or salted.

As they had been on the go steadily since early morning, they took a rest of two hours after halting for their dinner and then set out again.

The marks where the hatchet had clipped pieces of bark from the trees were still in evidence all the afternoon, and when sunset came they had reached another spot that was quite suitable for camping.

However, they moved off a few yards from the trail, so in case anyone should happen that way they would not be seen, since the shrubbery was so thick that, unless they had a fire burning, it would be impossible to locate them from the trail.

But they meant to have their campfire extinguished before darkness set in, so they got a hustle on them and the supper was soon cooked.

They had just about finished eating when they heard the noise made by one or more horses.

Whoever it was approaching they were not in a hurry, as the sounds indicated.

Wild went over to a break in the shrubbery and peered toward the trail.

The next minute he saw two Indian maidens approaching!

They were mounted on burros and seemed to be very anxious over something that had happened.

CHAPTER III.

WILD IS CAPTURED.

"Come here, Et!" called Young Wild West to his pretty sweetheart, "and see who is coming."

He spoke in a low tone, and in the same manner Arietta answered:

"Do I know him, Wild?"

"It is not a 'him,' but two 'hers.' No, you don't know them. They are two Apache squaws—maidens, I should say."

All hands followed Arietta to have a look.

When the two Indian maidens came to the spot where our friends had left the trail to go into camp they came to a halt and began whispering to each other and pointing at the ground.

"I guess we had better ease their minds a little," said our hero. "I will let them know that we are here, and that they need not fear us."

He pushed his way through the bushes, and the next moment stood before the two.

At first the squaws were going to turn and flee through the gathering darkness, but a word from him caused them to remain where they were.

"Don't be afraid," he said. "We are friends."

"Where palefaces go?" asked the foremost of the girls, after a second's silence.

"Nowhere in particular," Wild replied, walking up to them. "Where are you going?"

"To look for the bad palefaces who cut the trees," was the quick reply.

"Well, you won't catch them, so you may as well wait till they come back."

"They come back?" questioned the other girl, a pleased look showing on her face.

"Yes. We met them, and they told us they were coming back. They have cut the bark from the trees so they would be sure to know the way in case a storm came and wiped out the prints of their horses' hoofs."

"You follow marks on trees?" asked the first who had spoken.

"Well, we were coming this way, anyhow, I guess, so we thought we might as well follow the blazed trail and see where it led to."

"Palefaces must not go where the trail leads," and then both shook their heads solemnly.

"Palefaces are not allowed there, then?" said Wild, smiling at them.

"No."

"But there must have been palefaces there, or they could not have come away and made marks on the trees with a hatchet as they came."

"Two, three, five—six bad palefaces know where the lost village of the Apache is, but they have not been there. They try to get there, but they could not get across the deep cut in the mountain; they mark the trees and go away. That means that they will come back and find a way to get over the cut, and then they will come into the valley and be killed by the Apaches who live there."

"I see," said Wild, who was now greatly interested. "Well, the six men you speak of are very bad fellows, and they would like to kill us. But we won't let them do it. We will see to it that they don't get into the lost village, as you call it. Come and stay with us to-night. I suppose the village is a good distance from here."

"Five hours with a good horse; with these, longer," and the girl answering nodded at the burros.

At this juncture Arietta stepped into view, followed by Anna and Eloise.

The eyes of the two Indian maidens lighted with pleasure at the sight of three of their own sex, and they began to act more at their ease.

"Come into the camp," said Arietta. "You are welcome to stop with us to-night, if you wish. I like the looks of both of you."

"The paleface maiden is kind to the Apache squaws," retorted the one who had the most to say. "We will stay in the camp with the palefaces."

They led their burros to the camp and they were hobbled so they could not stray too far, after which the Indian girls asked if they could not do something to please the girls.

"Tell us something about the village you live in," suggested Arietta. "It must be a peculiar sort of a place. What are your names, to begin with?"

"I am Yellow Flower; she Sunlight," was the reply.

"Pretty names, I must say. Now tell us about your village."

Yellow Flower shook her head.

"The lost village of the Apaches is not for the palefaces to know about," she answered.

"But it would do no harm to tell us, would it?" persisted Arietta.

"The village is nice place," spoke up Sunlight. "The corn grows high and the flowers smell sweetly there. Twenty Apache men live there and more than a hundred squaws. We are good Indians; we don't want to fight the palefaces, but the palefaces must not come to the village. The six bad men who cut the trees so they could find the way back must die. Sunlight and Yellow Flower must kill them, because the medicine man has said it."

She showed a knife, which was concealed under the short skirt she wore, and then her companion did likewise.

"So you two were selected to kill the six bad men, were you?" spoke up Eloise. "Quite a task for two girls, I should say."

"Me no 'fraid of bad palefaces," Yellow Flower assured her.

"Why didn't the medicine man send some of the braves to do it?" questioned Arietta.

"The braves are few. They are getting fewer as the years pass. The medicine man does not want the braves to die, because if they all die then there will be an end to the band of Apaches who left their kindred and settled in the village in the valley."

"Ther blamed old medicine man has got a great head on him," observed Cheyenne Charlie. "He's a wise feller, ain't he? He don't want to run ther risk of losin' any of ther bucks, but ther squaws kin git killed, an' it will be all ther same. He's a fine galoot, I must say!"

The girls looked at Charlie warningly, for they saw that his remarks caused the two squaws to keep their tongues between their teeth.

By dint of talking and beating around the bush, Arietta managed to gleam from them that the band of Apaches that occupied what they called the "Lost Village" constituted the descendants of twenty who had become taken up with some religious frenzy and left the tribe some twenty years before.

Nearly all of them were educated at the schools on the reservation, and they had allowed English to be spoken by all who saw fit to use it.

Many children had been born during the twenty years, but fights with other Indian tribes had killed off the males until only twenty remained now.

But a year before an avalanche had caused a gulf to come between the outside world and the Lost Village, and that had been the means of keeping the enemies of the band from reaching them.

The inhabitants of the valley had found a way to get to and from the valley, though, and it was a secret that must not be divulged.

When they had told all this Arietta asked them why the six white men wanted to get into the valley so badly.

"They want to get the gold that is there," replied Yellow Flower. "They——"

Then she stopped short, for a warning look from Sunlight told her she had said too much.

Wild shook his head to his sweetheart, which meant that she was not to question them further on the subject.

If there was gold there he concluded that they would have to get there somehow and have a look at it.

The chances were that the peculiar set of Indians living there had no use for gold, anyhow, and if that was the case those who did have use for it might as well get the benefit of it.

"Well, Sunlight," said our hero, turning to the maiden who appeared to be the more reserved of the two, "we will see to it that the six bad palefaces do not get to the valley. We will go with you to the deep chasm that divides the valley from those who would like to get there, and then bid you goodby."

"The handsome paleface boy is very good," she replied. "But Yellow Flower and Sunlight were sent out by the medicine man to kill the bad palefaces, and they must not go back until they do."

"Yes!" spoke up the other, her eyes flashing. "We must do as the medicine man said, if we have to crawl into the cabin of the palefaces and put poison in the firewater they drink. They must not find a way to get into the Lost Village."

"Their cabin, you say?" asked Wild. "Have they got a cabin?"

"Yes. For two moons they have been near the village, and they have built themselves a house to live in. It is a big house, and a good one, too. They have dug for gold, and they have found some. At first the maidens of the village brought them corn, but the medicine man has read it in the stars that they must have no more corn from us,

and that they must die. They would kill all the Apaches if they got to the village and take the——"

She stopped abruptly.

"We will lie down if the paleface maidens will say so," she added a moment later. "Sunlight is tired and Yellow Flower is tired."

"All right," replied Arietta. "You shall sleep in the tent with us."

After some little persuasion they were induced to do this, and half an hour later all that were left up in the camp were the male members of the party.

Wing and Hop were playing some sort of Chinese game with a pack of cards, Charlie was puffing away on his pipe and Wild and Jim talking about the Lost Village.

But finally they grew sleepy, so in a few minutes all turned in but the watch.

The night passed quietly enough.

It was Wild's turn to go on duty as a guard two hours before daylight, and when he was called he got up and took a good wash in the little brook that trickled near by, and then he was ready for business.

He concluded to take a walk out as far as the blazed trail and see if there were any signs of the six men coming back.

He had scarcely reached the trail when he heard a slight noise ahead of him that sounded like a footfall.

Revolver in hand, he stood stock still and listened.

The next moment three men leaped upon him from behind!

His arms were pinioned to his sides and a hand thrust over his mouth at the same time.

"Sandy Ike is payin' his respects ter yer, Young Wild West!" a voice whispered, hoarsely. "It's a long lane what ain't got no turn, ain't it?"

Wild made one desperate struggle and then gave it up.

They had him foul, and there was no use in wasting his strength.

The boy was angered at himself for allowing the villains to catch him.

But it was such a neat trick that had been played that it was utterly impossible for one to escape falling in the hands of the men.

They surely had been laying for him, as the saying goes.

And it could not have happened at a worse time, as all those at the camp were sound asleep.

"What are yer goin' ter do with him, Ike?" asked a voice in a whisper.

"We'll take him to ther shanty with us," was the reply. "We might be able ter make somethin' out of him. Yer can't tell but what his gang might be willin' ter give up a pile of money ter git him back. I don't like ther boy fur what he done ter us, so we kin keep him an' work ther game without interferin' with our other plans."

"All right, Ike. You know best. I thought maybe yer was a-goin' ter kill ther boy. I don't believe in killin' anyone, unless it is awful necessary, I don't. If we kin make anything by takin' him to ther shanty an' holdin' him a prisoner there fur awhile, all right."

When Young Wild West heard these remarks he felt quite easy.

He realized that, though they were villains, the gang he had fallen in the clutches of were not addicted to cold-blooded murder.

That meant that it would be only a question of a short time before he would get away from them.

Being captured was not a new thing to Young Wild West.

The men picked him up bodily and carried him along the trail in the direction the two young squaws had come from.

They stopped at the end of about fifty yards, and then they hastened to bind and gag their prisoner.

All the time they were holding him so tightly that he knew it would be useless for him to try and break loose from them.

"Don't you think it would be a good idea to take his horse, too, Cap?" spoke up one of the six villains. "They must be all asleep in ther camp by this time. You know we got in sight of it jest as ther boy was woke up by ther other two. If we take his horse, too, they might think he went off on his own accord."

"Thunder!" exclaimed Sandy Ike. "You've got a great head, Sam! I'll app'int you ter go an' git his horse. Ther sorrel is his, I reckon, 'cause it is ther finest beast in ther lot, an' he's about ther finest in ther two-legged line, 'cept ther gals; so it are most likely that he an' ther horse goes together."

"Well, I'll soon have ther sorrel, then," and off went the man called Sam. He was as good as his word, for in a few minutes he came back with our hero's horse. Then Wild was bound upon the back of Spitfire, the sorrel, and off went the gang of villains at a rapid gait.

CHAPTER IV.

ARIETTA AS A SCOUT.

Cheyenne Charlie slept a little later than usual that morning.

He was the first to awaken, for all that, and when he got up the sun was shining brightly.

The scout looked around him in a puzzled way.

He thought it very queer that Wild had not aroused them all before this.

"Great gimlets!" he exclaimed. "What's ther matter, anyhow? Could Wild have gone to sleep instead of takin' his trick at watchin'? Hey, there! Git up, everybody! It's gittin' late."

Jim Dart was upon his feet in an instant.

Out of the tent he came in a hurry.

"What's the matter, Charlie?" he asked.

"I don't know what's the matter. Here we are over an hour late in gittin' up."

"Where's Wild?"

"That's what's puzzlin' me, Jim."

"Why, isn't he here?" cried Jim, looking around the camp in surprise.

"No, not that I kin see."

The two Chinamen were aroused, and then a little later the girls came out of their tent, followed by the two young squaws.

"What has happened?" asked Arietta, looking around in surprise. "We have overslept ourselves, eh? Why, where is Wild?"

"Gone to take a little scout around the neighborhood, most likely," answered Jim. "He is not to be seen anywhere."

Just then Cheyenne Charlie, who had been over where the horses were grazing, exclaimed:

"Spitfire is gone, too. Wild must have took a ride for some reason or other."

"This is very queer," and Arietta shook her head. "Wild is not in the habit of doing things this way. He would not have left the camp of his own accord without waking somebody. He don't do things that way."

The scout shook his head.

He was a badly puzzled man just then.

Sunlight and Yellow Flower, the Apache maidens, looked on in wonder.

They did not know what all the excitement and anxiety meant.

When they asked about it, Arietta told them that Young Wild West had disappeared in some strange manner, and that his horse was gone, too.

"He come back," said Sunlight. "He go look for something."

"Yes, the handsome paleface young man will come back," added Yellow Flower. "He no leave the beautiful maiden with the hair of gold. She is the sunshine of his heart, and he would never leave her. Yellow Flower can tell."

Arietta felt pleased at this remark.

But it did not allay her fears, though.

If Wild had gone off on horseback without first letting someone in the camp know of it, he had done something that was very unusual.

Charlie and Jim now made a thorough search of the camp.

They were not long in finding that Wild's saddle was there, but that Charlie's was missing.

"That settles it!" exclaimed the scout. "Wild wouldn't have took my saddle in mistake for his own; he knows better than that. It wasn't him that took ther horse from here, you kin bet!"

"Who could it have been, then?" Jim asked in surprise.

"That's for us to find out. It might be that them six fellers we met has been follerin' us, an' that they managed to git ther best of Wild this mornin' an' lugged him off somewhere. We've got to find him, Jim!"

"That's right, Charlie."

In a very few minutes they had their horses saddled and were ready to leave.

"Which way are you going to look for him?" Arietta asked.

"We don't know," replied Jim. "We want to strike the trail if we can. We are now satisfied that he was captured and taken away. His saddle is here, and Charlie's is gone."

"We must have slept pretty sound for all that to happen without any of us being awakened."

"That is so. No doubt we did sleep sound. But we thought Wild was awake, you know."

"Of course," answered the girl. "Anyone can feel safe when they know Wild is on the watch."

Cheyenne Charlie was now scratching his head in a thoughtful way.

"I don't know as it will hardly do for both of us to go away to once, Jim," he said. "S'pose that gang is somewhere near by? They might come here an' make things hum."

"That's so," retorted the boy. "One of us better stay here, then."

"Which one of us will it be, Jim?"

"I suppose you had better go and look for Wild, Charlie. I know you feel as though you ought to."

"It's jest as you say. If you feel that you oughter go, why go ahead. I'll stay with ther girls."

"All right, then," and the scout started off, while Jim dismounted and put his horse away.

The two squaws were rather uneasy when they heard that it was quite likely that the six villains had been to the camp while they were sleeping.

"They come back and find the way to the Lost Village before we kill them," said Sunlight.

"The tongue of Yellow Flower is not crooked when she says that," replied her companion.

Arietta was doing some hard thinking just about now, and when she heard the remarks of the squaws she brightened up.

"Sunlight," she said, looking at the one she considered to be the more intelligent of the two, "will you go with me and help me find the handsome boy with the long hair? We may find the bad men you are after at the same time, for I think they have got him."

Sunlight hesitated.

"Yellow Flower go, too," she said.

"No. Yellow Flower can stay here. I will wear the clothing of Yellow Flower and make out that I am an Apache. I will go out as a scout to find Young Wild West."

The squaws had a short conversation in their own tongue. Then Yellow Flower called Arietta into the tent and began taking off her garments.

"I will stay here while the paleface maiden goes to look for her lover," she said. "Sunlight and Yellow Flower must not go back to the village until the six bad palefaces are dead. The medicine man has said so, and they will not go."

"All right," answered Arietta. "I will let you have

enough to wear in place of what you lend me. I will make a pretty fair looking squaw, I think."

"But your hair must be black," spoke up Sunlight, as she came in the tent. "I can make it black; I have the paint of the Apaches with me. I will make the golden hair black and the pale face the color of the skin of the Apache. The pretty maiden will make a fine squaw when Sunlight fixes her."

"What do you mean to do, Arietta?" called out Jim from the outside.

"I am going to be a scout," was the reply. "Something tells me that I am the one to save Wild."

"You are not going to risk going out to look for him, are you?"

"Why not? Just wait till you see me in disguise."

Jim said no more.

He knew the girl had a mind of her own, and the only one she would listen to was Wild.

But he also knew that she possessed plenty of grit and knew how to defend herself in case she got into trouble.

In about twenty minutes Arietta and the two squaws came out of the tent.

The change in Arietta was a wonderful one!

Sunlight, assisted by Yellow Flower, had surely made her look like a real Apache girl.

And Yellow Flower, since she wore some of Arietta's garments, looked to be far more civilized than she had before going into the tent.

Anna and Eloise looked at the girl in admiration.

"My!" exclaimed the former. "You certainly beat anything I ever saw, Et."

"Oh, not so bad as that, I guess," was the reply. "Come on, Sunlight. We are going to look for my lover."

"If you really mean to go," spoke up Jim, "you had better eat something before you start."

"I suppose that would be the right thing to do, but I have no appetite."

"Suppose you wait awhile? Charlie might find Wild, you know."

This struck Arietta as being a wise proposition.

"I guess I will give Charlie a chance to take a look around," she said.

The two Chinamen were busy preparing breakfast, and they soon called out that it was ready.

But they and the two Indian maidens were the only ones who were hungry.

The rest were too worried over the strange disappearance of Young Wild West to eat much.

But they all knew that they must take food if they wished to keep up their strength, so they did the best they could with the breakfast.

A couple of hours flitted by.

Charlie had not got back yet.

"I am not going to wait any longer!" declared Arietta. "I am going out to find Wild!"

There was no use in trying to persuade her, so Jim simply nodded all right.

The two burros were led out and made ready for mounting.

Then Arietta and Sunlight got upon their backs and started off.

As soon as they reached the trail they found the fresh tracks of horses going the way they had been following the blazed trail, and as the prints of hoofs were made by more than one steed, they knew that Cheyenne Charlie was not the only one who had gone that way.

"Horses of bad palefaces go this way," said Sunlight.

"Yes," answered Arietta.

"They go back to cabin not far from chasm."

"Probably."

"And if they have the handsome boy with the long hair they take him there, too."

"Yes, that is so, unless they have killed him," and the girl felt a pang shoot through her heart.

The Indian maiden said nothing to this.

For the next ten minutes they rode along in silence, and if anyone could have met them they surely would both have been taken for squaws.

The long-eared little beasts they were riding were capable of carrying good loads, but it was impossible to make them go fast.

This made it very tiresome to Arietta.

But as long as she saw the trail ahead of her she resolved to stick it out.

There was really no need of the trees being blazed to show the way now, but they were, just the same, and the girl noticed it continually as they rode along.

For three hours they rode along without meeting a human being.

And the prints on the ground showed that the horsemen had continued along the trail.

They took a short rest and then proceeded on the way again.

It was near the middle of the afternoon when Sunlight suddenly turned to her disguised companion and exclaimed:

"In two more minutes we no go any further."

"Is that so?" asked Arietta, in surprise. "Are we so near the end of the blazed trail as that?"

"Yes, we soon have to stop."

The squaw was right, for the next minute they came to a deep chasm that was about twenty feet in width.

On the opposite side were plenty of trees that might be felled so they would fall across and form a bridge, but on the side where they were it so happened that there were none near enough to be made to answer for that purpose.

Arietta dismounted from the burro she was so tired of riding, and Sunlight followed her example.

The squaw stopped the girl as she walked close to the edge of the chasm.

"Don't! The paleface maiden might fall down there. There is no bottom," she exclaimed.

"How do you get to the other side, then?" asked Arietta.

"Come, let us go and look for the handsome paleface boy with the long hair," was the evasive reply.

"All right."

It was all solid rock where the trail ended so abruptly, and consequently they could not see the tracks of the horses they had been following.

But Sunlight knew where to go, however.

She led her burro along a sort of ledge and Arietta followed.

A hundred yards over a winding course upon solid rock and they started up a hill that was covered with a dense growth of trees and brush.

"Up there is the cabin where the six bad paleface men stay!"

CHAPTER V.

WILD IS HELD FOR RANSOM.

Young Wild West had heard the villainous leader of the gang say that they were going to take him to their shanty, and, according to what one of the squaws had said in the camp, it must be five hours' ride from their present position.

That meant a tedious time for him, for it was hardly probable that his friends would awaken in time to overtake the men before they reached their destination.

Wild was tied to the back of his own horse so securely that there was not the least possible show for him to get off, but he did not mind this half as much as he did the piece of cloth that had been tied across his mouth to prevent him from crying out.

When they had covered about five miles at a swift gallop Sandy Ike fell back by the side of the captive, and, reaching over the gag, exclaimed:

"I reckon I'll take this thing out of your mouth, as I want to talk to yer a bit, Young Wild West."

The boy was greatly revived when this was done, and as soon as he had the use of his tongue he remarked:

"Well, Sandy Ike, you no doubt think you have done a very smart thing, but you really have made the biggest mistake of your life."

"Oh, I don't know about that," was the retort. "But you seem to take things putty cool, fur a feller in sich a tight place as you are. How much money have yer got in your clothes?"

"Not much."

This was a fact, as Wild had placed nearly all his money in a little pocket inside his saddle-bags.

But it was not his own saddle he was sitting upon!

He had become aware of that almost the instant he was placed upon Spitfire's back.

Just then he had less than twenty dollars in his pockets.

"Well, how much—about?" insisted the villain.

"Something like eighteen or twenty dollars."

"Are you sure that is all?"

"There would be no need of me telling what wasn't so; you will find out if you want to, anyhow."

"Well, I reckon we'd better know right away, then. Stop a minute, boys!"

The villains came to a halt as soon as they could check the sorrel stallion.

Then Sandy Ike went through our hero's pockets and found the money.

"You ain't very well fixed, I see," he observed, a trifle disappointedly. "I suppose your friends has got considerable money an' jewelry with 'em, though?" he questioned.

"Maybe they have," our hero retorted.

He knew what the man was driving at, for he had overheard his remark when he said he was going to hold him a captive and try and make his friends pay for his release.

"Well, how much do yer s'pose they could raise?" went on Sandy Ike.

"I don't know," was the retort.

"Could they raise a thousand between 'em?"

"I think they could do that easy enough if they had to."

"Good! That would do, if we couldn't git any more."

"So you are going to make my friends pay a thousand dollars before you will let me go free, then?"

"That's jest what we're goin' ter do."

Wild remained silent to make them think he was studying over it.

But in reality he was laughing softly to himself.

He knew what the result would be if one of them went to Charlie and the rest with such a proposition as that.

It would result in his speedy release, and no money paid out, either.

He determined to help them along on this line.

"If you sent a man to my friends they might pay over the money for my release," he said.

"Yer think they would, hey?"

"Well, they wouldn't want me to be kept imprisoned somewhere. They would be anxious for me to get with them, so they could go ahead for the place we are heading for."

"Where are yer headin' fur?"

"The Grand Canyon," answered Wild, saying the first thing that came in his head.

This seemed to satisfy the villain, and he pushed ahead again and had no more to say for the next hour.

Pretty soon it began to grow daylight, and then Wild got to thinking that in a little while his friends would miss him.

It was not until they had covered a good fifteen miles before the gang halted to give their horses a blow again.

The sun was rising now, and as Wild looked about him he saw that they were still following the blazed trail.

"You fellows must have thought you would not be able to find your way back, or you wouldn't have taken so much trouble as to chip the bark from the trees here and there on the way," he remarked, looking at Sandy Ike.

"That's what's ther matter!" was the quick response.

"But we intended to be gone longer than this, yer know, an' it might have been there'd be rain afore we got back."

"I see."

"We wouldn't have been back in a couple of weeks, mebbe, if we hadn't run across your gang."

"Is that so?" asked our hero, coolly.

"Yes, that's so. We changed our mind after we met you, an' findin' out that you'd took our trail, we thought we'd come back, too."

"You thought you might make something out of us, eh?"

"That's it!"

"Then you are outlaws, I suppose?"

"Never mind about that. But I reckon we ain't too good to do almost anything, if we take a notion."

"Well, it is a very lucky thing for you that you caught me as you did, for if I had seen you in time some of you would have gone under!"

"We knows that, all right. We seen enough of yer when we met yer ther night afore last to know that. You are sartinly a sooner, you are!"

Wild smiled.

They appeared to be harmless in one way, and yet they evidently meant to hold him until they got paid for his relief.

"The almighty dollar is what they are after," he thought. "But they have rigged up a mighty poor plan to get any more than they took from me, I'll venture to say!"

When the horses were rested sufficiently they proceeded on their way, and a little over half an hour later they came to the end of the blazed trail.

When our hero saw the yawning chasm before them he was much interested.

"The rascals' shanty must be somewhere close by," he thought. "I wonder how the Apaches manage to get over that chasm and keep the way a secret, anyhow? I will have to try and find out somehow."

Those of the horses that were shod made considerable noise on the level stretch of rock, and when they turned to the left the clicking reminded Wild of riding along in the streets of a large city.

The boy was keeping his eyes open, however, and when they finally reached the end of a narrow ledge and turned up a hill he had the place marked well in his mind.

The bushes were so thick that the horses had to force their way through them, and this was kept up until the top was reached.

Then, right in the center of a little clearing, our hero saw a fairly well made log house.

"Is that your shanty?" he asked one of the men.

"Yes," was the reply. "It is a putty good shanty fur us ter make, I s'pose yer think?"

"Yes, I was thinking that."

"Well, there ain't nothin' strange about it, since four of us always worked at ther carpenter trade till we drifted out to ther gold diggin's."

"That accounts for it, then."

"Yes, we had some of our tools with us, an' it's mighty

easy ter make a log house, yer know, if you've got good axes an' sich."

"I suppose it is, providing you know how to go at it."

"Well, we knowed how."

The house showed plainly that they did know how, and when they rode around to the rear and dismounted Wild saw that they had a good-sized stable there, too.

To the right of this, running almost to the chasm, which could be seen from where he sat in the saddle, was a piece of ground that showed signs of having been worked by the pick and shovel.

The six villains dismounted and proceeded to put their horses away.

"Is this the place that no one knows of except those who live here?" Wild asked, as Sandy Ike untied him from the horse.

"I reckon it is," was the reply.

"This is the only habitation here, then?"

"Right here, yes! But across that chasm, jest ther other side of that hill over there, is more habitations, as yer call 'em."

"Are the people living there anything like you fellows?"

The man shook his head.

"I reckon you want ter know too much fur a prisoner what's bein' held fur ransom," he remarked.

Wild's horse was as well cared for as the rest, and then they conducted their prisoner into the shanty.

It was of one big room, and when he had looked around a bit Sandy Ike pointed to a corner and told the men to place Wild there.

"See to it that he's tied so he don't stand ther least show to git loose," he said. "If he was to git ther use of his hands an' feet he might do some harm afore we could stop him."

"In that case we'd be justified in killin' him," spoke up the man Wild had heard addressed as Sam; "but so long as he behaves himself we've got ter treat him putty decent. It's money we're after, an' I think he's sense enough ter understand how it is, an' not ter bother with us if his freedom is bought."

"I understand enough for that," spoke up Wild, intending to let them think that he was perfectly agreeable to the plan they proposed to put in operation.

The villains found some salted meat in the shanty, and they lost no time in kindling a fire on the hearth and starting in to get a meal ready.

When it was decided that the prisoner was perfectly safe one of them brought in the saddle he had been seated on during the ride over the blazed trail and hung it to a big nail that was almost over the boy's head.

The weapons they had taken from him were left lying on the rough floor of the shanty for want of a better place to put them.

The furniture in the place was rather scanty, and what there was of it was home-made, showing that, as bad as the men were, they had been quite industrious since they had located there.

A half decent meal was prepared and Wild was allowed to have one of his hands free while he ate and drank a cup of coffee.

Then he was bound again, and the men began talking about sending to get the money they demanded for his release.

"Ther chances is that ther friends of ther boy will foller ther trail right along, since they'll find out easy that we've come along this way. Now, one of you fellers must ride back to meet 'em an' tell 'em what's up."

His followers remained perfectly silent as this was said.

"There's plenty of time yet," went on Sandy. "We'll give 'em a chance to git putty near to ther chasm afore one of yer goes out to meet 'em. Then yer won't have so much of a ride."

"If we only had some licker ter drink we'd be all right," spoke up one of the gang. "That was one of ther main things we struck out ter git."

"If we could only git across that blamed chasm," said Sandy Ike, shaking his head thoughtfully, "we could get plenty of licker an' plenty of everything else. I'd jest give ten dollars if one of them squaws come along now with a big skin full of licker!"

Some of the villains began to yawn, among them being the leader.

"I'm goin' to lay down, boys," he said. "Don't all go to sleep, now; as many as two of yer must keep awake to watch ther boy, yer know. It won't do to give him ther least chance, yer know."

"I'll be one ter watch him," spoke up Sam.

Another volunteered to keep him company, and then the rest laid down upon their blankets and went to sleep.

It was about an hour after noon when Sandy Ike awoke.

"Cook some more grub," he bawled out. "Then Gizzle will go an' look fur ther friends of Young Wild West. It's gittin' late, an' it oughter been done afore."

Gizzle was a man who looked as though he might have been cut out for a minister, for, if he had his beard trimmed and was dressed in style, he would have been a very good-looking, meek-faced man.

He did not like the idea of being the messenger very well, but he agreed to do go, since it was the captain's orders.

The meal was the same kind as the breakfast had been, and Wild partook of but little that was offered him.

But the rest ate heartily, and when he was through Gizzle stepped up and received his instructions, and then went out and mounted his horse to deliver the message to the friends of Young Wild West.

And that was the last they ever saw of Gizzle!

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT CHEYENNE CHARLIE DID.

It was a long search that Cheyenne Charlie had when he set out to find Young Wild West.

He followed the tracks made by the horses of the villains who took the boy away with them, as might be supposed, but when he reached the end of the blazed trail at the edge of the narrow gulf he found himself stumped.

"This are what I calls putty tough," the scout muttered. "Now ther question is, which way did they go? One thing is sartin. They didn't ride right over ther preecipice!"

There was no tracks to guide him—not the least sound of any, so he simply had to go by guess-work.

For fully ten minutes he remained there looking in every direction, and then Charlie decided on a course to take.

It so happened that he thought it best to proceed directly opposite to the hill where the shanty of the six villains was located.

He rode his horse up a short ascent and reached an almost level tract that ran off to the north close to the chasm, which wound this way and that like the trail of a snake.

The ground—or rock, more properly speaking—that he was traversing was so flinty that a horse's hoof could not make a print upon it.

That left it mere guess-work.

The only thing he felt sure of was that the villains had turned either to the right or left.

And it so happened that he had turned to the left.

That was all.

If he had taken the path along the ledge he might have come upon the shanty in the clearing at the top of the hill.

But he could have easily passed within a short distance of it and not seen it, too.

The scout rode along until the way became so rocky and uneven that he thought it best to dismount and lead his horse.

He worked his way along a little further and then suddenly came in view of a sight that made him open wide his eyes.

Below him and to the left slightly he saw an Indian village!

"Great gimlets!" he exclaimed; "that must be ther place them squaws was talkin' about. I wonder if it kin be that them measly coyotes could have took Wild there? They might have found ther way, in spite of what ther squaws said. Ther chances is that if ther medicine man wanted 'em killed so bad he must have known that they knew ther way to git in ther valley. I'll bet a plug of tobacker that they're there now, an' that Wild's with 'em!"

The scout had heard enough from Sunlight and Yellow Flower to make him convinced that the Apaches in the village were not hostile.

They simply desired to live there in seclusion, in accordance with their fanatical ideas.

If any whites chanced to get there they would not be apt to kill them, though they might try rather hard to keep them from going away again.

That is the way Charlie figured it out, and the more he thought over it the more he became convinced that he had arrived at the right conclusion.

From the position he stood in he could see all over the little village.

It was not like the ordinary Indian villages he had often looked upon, but there was just enough about it to make it plain that it was an Indian village.

The lodges and tepees were not there, but there were many little one-storied huts with thatched roofs, and the people he saw moving about were unquestionably Apaches, though they seemed to be anything but war-like in appearance.

There was a peculiar sort of neatness about the place, too, and this was strangely out of order, as far as Indian villages went.

Squaws at work, children running about in play, plenty of dogs and a few braves seated under the trees smoking could be seen.

But no sign of the white men could the scout see.

"It's mighty funny," he mused, as he began to think it over. "If them six fellers is there, where are they? I oughter be able to see some signs of 'em, even if I can't set eyes on their identical persons. Maybe they ain't there, after all."

Finally the scout concluded it would be a good idea to wait and see what turned up in the village below him.

Throwing the bridle-rein over his horse's head, he climbed to an eminence of rock and took a seat where he could have a good view of the valley that was over on the other side of the zigzag-shaped chasm.

Of course, he made it a point to get where he would not be apt to be seen, in case any of the redskins should happen to look that way.

Charlie sat there for a long while, but saw nothing that would lead him to believe that Wild, or the men he was certain had captured him, were there.

Then he looked up at the sun and saw that it was past the hour of noon.

He had had no breakfast, too, and there was a gnawing in the pit of his stomach that he had been trying hard to overcome for the past few hours.

"I reckon I've gone an' got 'way off ther track," he muttered, as he turned to his patient steed. "I've got to look somewhere else for Wild, but I've got to have something to eat, too!"

He did not have a thing to eat with him except some salt, which was always carried by him and his partners in their saddle-bags, and though this was not his saddle, he knew the salt was there.

He looked around for a way to leave the spot he had come to without going back the way he had come and soon found one.

Then, taking his horse by the bridle, he led him over the rough ground and soon reached the woods.

Then Charlie began looking for something to shoot.

He did not want to strike a bear, or a deer, either; he wanted something in the line of a fowl just then.

It so happened that there was plenty of game in that particular section, and he had not proceeded very far

through the woods when he came upon a flock of sage hens. The scout had a very keen eye, and, watching where the birds settled, he soon got a shot and knocked a pair of them over with one bullet.

"Now for some water," he muttered, as he started in to pluck the feathers. "I know I run a risk by firin' that shot, as the measly coyotes might be within hearin'; but when a man's hungry he's got to take all kinds of chances. If ther shot brings any of that gang this way I don't know but that it will jest suit me. I'll make short work of ther galoots, blamed if I don't."

The place where the scout was, being not so very far from the mouth of the Little Colorado, there were plenty of mountain streams in the neighborhood which emptied into the river, and it did not take him long to find one.

It was but a mere trickling stream, but that was all he wanted just then.

He started a fire from some dry wood he hastily gathered, and then, while the live coals were forming, he cleaned and washed the two birds and salted them ready for broiling.

A forked stick sharpened at the ends answered for a broiler, and it was not long before a very appetizing odor filled the air in that vicinity.

Though he was very hungry, Charlie waited until the sage hens were done to his liking, and then he started in and did full justice to them.

"There!" he muttered, as he looked around after finishing his repast, "I feel better now. I reckon I kin stand it till sunset, all right."

He mounted his horse and rode back to the trail.

Just as he was about to turn toward the chasm he heard the sound of hoofs coming from that direction.

Cheyenne Charlie remained seated in the saddle with his horse at a halt.

The next moment a man appeared in view mounted on an Indian pony.

One glance and the scout knew he had seen the fellow before.

It was one of the six "measly coyotes," as he termed them.

A thrill of joy shot through the scout.

He felt that he was pretty certain of finding Wild in a short time now.

The man was Gizzle, as the reader might easily guess.

He had just left the shanty in the woods to go on the errand his leader had sent him out to do.

He recognized the scout as one of the friends of Young Wild West, and as he neared him he slowed up.

"Hello, pard!" he called out; "I'm lookin' fur yer."

"Lookin' fur me?" retorted Charlie.

"Fur you, pard."

"Well, what do you want?"

"I want to tell you that Young Wild West is all right."

"He is, hey?"

"Yes. He ain't been hurted a particle."

"Is that all you want to tell me?" queried Charlie.

"No. I want ter tell yer that Sandy Ike says that you an' ther rest of his—Young Wild West, I mean—friends has got ter come down with a thousand dollars afore he will be let go."

"Is that so?" and the scout suddenly placed the muzzle of his revolver under the man's nose.

"Don't blame me fur sayin' it," cried Gizzle, in a frightened manner. "I'm only doin' as I was told."

"Well, that's all right. Now I want you to keep right on doin' as you're told. You jest take me to where Young Wild West is, or I'll blow ther top of your head off!"

The face of the villain turned all colors.

He was doing a lot of thinking, though, and he must have decided that it would be right for him to throw his man off the track, instead of betraying his partners.

"I'll take yer there," he said, after an interval of silence. "I don't want my head blowed off."

"You're a sensible galoot," retorted Charlie.

Gizzle hesitated for a moment and then turned and rode nearly to the chasm, Charlie keeping close at his side with his revolver raised meanwhile.

It was evident that the villain was hoping to get a chance to get away, but he meant to get Charlie as far off the right track as he possibly could before he did so.

Charlie thought he had him right where he wanted him, however, and that he would be led to the place where Wild was confined.

Gizzle turned to the left, but it was before he came to the edge; and, ascending a short incline, reached the woods.

"Ther headquarters of the gang is over here," he said, nodding in a direction that was almost contrary to where the shanty was.

The villain knew the country pretty well there, and about a quarter of a mile away he knew where there was a sharp turn and dense woods.

If he could get around this suddenly and reach the cover of the woods he felt that he would be able to leave the scout in the lurch long enough for him to turn and shoot him from ambush.

Cheyenne Charlie had no idea of what was passing through the man's mind.

If he had he would have dealt summarily with him.

But as far as his getting away from his captor was concerned, Gizzle stood a very poor show.

Cheyenne Charlie was not a man who would stand any fooling.

"How far is ther place where Young Wild West is?" he asked as they rode along.

"Tain't hardly half a mile," was the reply. "We've got a sort of diggin's over there all by ourselves. Don't blame me if you git shot at when you git in sight of ther shanty."

"I won't blame you any," retorted the scout, with a chuckle. "I reckon if they shoot me ther bullet will go through your carcass first. I'm goin' to git Young Wild

West away from your gang, an' we ain't goin' to pay no thousand dollars, either."

"You might be better off if you did pay it," said Gizzle, who saw that the bend was not far ahead now. "Ther easiest way is ther best generally."

"It'll be easy enough without payin' any thousand dollars, see if it ain't! When I git to lettin' hot lead fly that gang of yours will think they have struck a Kansas tornado! Some of 'em will go under if they don't let Young Wild West go right away an' let his horse go with him."

"Well, I only come to yer as a messenger, so I hope yer won't think hard of me."

"Oh, I don't think no harder of you than I did afore," and Charlie smiled grimly. "You're nothin' more than a measly coyote, an' you know it. You ain't got enough sand in you to light a sulphur match."

Gizzle made no reply to this.

He was getting ready to make his dash for life and liberty!

"If you go to foolin' me," went on the scout, "I'll shoot you just as sure as my name are Cheyenne Charlie!"

"I ain't goin' ter fool yer," was the reply.

But there was something in the man's voice that put Charlie on his guard, though his face or manner did not indicate it.

One second later and the villain lowered his head and urged his horse forward around the bend.

Crack!

Cheyenne Charlie fired, and that was the last of Gizzle!

CHAPTER VII.

ARIETTA RESCUES WILD.

Arietta could see nothing but a dense woods as Sunlight pointed up the hill.

"How far is the cabin?" she asked.

"Not far; pretty close by."

"Have you ever been there?"

"Yes, I have been there with cornmeal and firewater. The six bad palefaces gave a horse to the Apaches for firewater and meal. Squaws bring it to them whenever medicine man say so. Three days ago he say no more."

Sunlight got off the burro as she said this and walked over to a mass of hanging vines.

She pulled them aside and then Arietta saw what appeared to be a sack tied at the top with a string.

But when the Indian maiden touched the thing it moved like a bowl of jelly.

"That firewater," said Sunlight; "we fetch along to give bad men and make drunk; then we kill. But they no in cabin, so Yellow Flower and Sunlight leave firewater here and follow trail."

"I see!" exclaimed Arietta, as it occurred to her that the skin of liquor would surely be the means of getting Wild free if the villains had him, as she felt sure they did.

"We take firewater to cabin and see if the handsome lover of the beautiful paleface maiden is there."

"Yes," retorted Arietta, not paying any attention to the flattering remarks of her companion, "we will go right away with it. Sunlight, you need not have much to say; just let me do the talking."

"You talk like Apache squaw?"

"Yes, me talk heap much like Apache maiden," the girl answered, affecting the ways of an Indian with just enough of the broken dialect to make it sound right.

"Good!" exclaimed Sunlight. "The maiden with the hair of gold is wonderful!"

"Heap much wonderful!" added Arietta.

"Yes."

Sunlight was nothing but serious, though Arietta could not keep from laughing.

But she quickly settled down to business.

Then the two of them lifted the skin of liquor upon the back of the burro Arietta had been riding, and with Sunlight holding it so it would not fall off, she led the long-eared animal up the hill.

In less than a minute she saw the shanty among the trees.

"Now just make out that we came from the village," the brave girl whispered to her companion.

Sunlight nodded.

As she neared the front of the shanty the door opened and out came Sandy Ike and two of his men.

Gizzle had been gone a little over ten minutes now, and though they were not aware of it, he had been shot less than three minutes before the arrival of the two squaws—or the one squaw and disguised white girl, who was acting as a scout to find her lover.

Of course, the five villains were delighted when they saw the skin of liquor on the back of the burro.

They paid more attention to that than they did to the girls.

"We bring some firewater for the palefaces," said Arietta, pointing to the skin.

"You're good Injun gals, you are!" retorted Sandy Ike. "I'll buy yer both a new calico dress when I go to town ag'in."

Then he hastily stepped up and seized the coveted liquor. One of the others took hold of it with him and carried it in the shanty.

Arietta stepped in after them.

"What do yer want, gal?" demanded the man called Sam, as the girl looked calmly about the interior.

She shook her head in the negative.

"Well, go on out, then. This ain't no place for yer."

He took her by the arm and led her to the door again.

But Arietta had seen enough!

Young Wild West was there!

She had sighted him at the first glance, and she felt so elated that she could hardly suppress a cry of joy.

Arietta did not want to go out, but she felt that in order

to carry out the deception she was practicing she must do, so without objecting.

The five delighted men now proceeded to transfer the contents of the skin to some jugs and bottles they had.

But they did not forget to take a drink all around first.

The liquor was the fomented juice of a peculiar pungent grape that grew in the valley, and it was as strong as any whisky ever made.

But the stronger the better, so the men thought.

The door of the shanty was left ajar and the two girls remained outside.

Presently Arietta took a walk around to the rear.

She saw the shed that formed the stable, and then the sorrel was the first horse she took notice of.

"I shall ride away on the back of Spitfire," the girl murmured to herself, "and Wild will be there with me."

For fear that the villains might see her and think she was trying to steal, she did not go too close to the horses; but, after looking at them for a minute or two, went around to the front again.

She found that Sunlight had moved away further from the shanty, taking the two burros with her.

Arietta looked at her questioningly.

"We will wait here till the firewater makes the bad paleface men sleepy," the Apache maiden said.

"All right. I guess that is a good idea, Sunlight. I feel happy now, and I am willing to wait, because I hardly think the men mean to kill Wild."

"We can watch them and see what they do. When it gets dark they will be drunk. Then you can go in and cut the ropes that bind your paleface lover. He will come out, and then I will go and kill them!"

"You surely don't mean that you intend to kill the men in cold blood, Sunlight?"

The young squaw shrugged her shoulders.

"The medicine man has willed it," she answered.

"But they have done nothing to you or your people but to seek a way to get into your village. That is hardly cause enough to kill them."

Arietta was always averse to the shedding of blood, and the proposition of the squaw was almost horrifying to her.

"I do not want to kill the bad men; I do not want to kill anybody," said Sunlight, after a pause.

"But because the medicine man says so, you are willing to do it, is that it?"

"Yes."

"Well, don't you kill them unless they try to kill you first. Never mind what the medicine man says. He is too much of a coward to do such things himself, so he sends the maidens of the village to do it. He cares nothing for you, and if you should lose your life in trying to do as he told you he will only laugh. The medicine man is wrong, Sunlight."

The Apache looked as though she half agreed with her, but said nothing.

Arietta was just about to continue in the same strain when she heard a rustle in the bushes close by.

She turned quickly and beheld a well-known figure standing before them.

It was Cheyenne Charlie!

After he had shot the villain who had tried to deceive him and then get away, the scout had continued the search for the headquarters of the rascally gang who had captured Wild.

By good luck, more than anything else, he had found the path leading up the hill to the shanty.

While ascending it he had heard the low voices of Arietta and Sunlight, and, recognizing the former, he had dismounted and advanced on foot.

Charlie was greatly surprised when he saw what he thought was a young squaw instead of Arietta.

But he easily penetrated her disguise when he saw the happy smile that came over her painted face.

"Great gimlets!" he ejaculated. "Is it you, Arietta?"

"Hush! Not so loud, Charlie. Five of the villains are close by in a shanty, and they have got Wild there."

"Good enough!" replied the scout in a lower tone. "I reckon there's only five of 'em, all right. I dropped the other feller."

"Is that so, Charlie?"

"Yes, I collared him, an' he tried to fool me an' then git away. It wouldn't have done to let him, I thought, so I shot."

"Did he confess that they had Wild a prisoner?"

"I reckon he did, an' more. He said he was sent to find us an' tell us that we must pay a thousand dollars afore they would let Wild go."

"Oh!"

Arietta was surprised.

But her face lighted up, for now she was assured that Wild would not be harmed.

"Well," she observed, after a pause, "I think we had better wait until dark. Then we will be able to get Wild free."

"What's ther use of waitin'?" Charlie asked, impatiently. "I reckon I kin clean out that crowd in no time. They're a lot of cowards, that's what they are!"

"But they may put up a good fight in their own shanty. No, there is no need of running any risk at all. You just go back and fetch the rest here. I will attend to getting Wild away from the men."

The scout looked at her in silence for a moment.

Then he turned to leave, saying as he did so:

"I reckon I'll do as you say, Arietta. You're ther boss of this business, since you was the one to find Wild. I'll go on back, but it'll be long after dark when we git there."

"Never mind that. We will meet you. In case we don't you will know that something has happened to us. There is no need of killing any more of the villains, unless it is a matter of compulsion."

"All right."

Charlie waited no longer, but walked back to where he had left his horse, and, mounting, rode away.

He had the utmost confidence in what Arietta said, and

as she was the sweetheart of his young friend and leader, it was easy for him to give way to her.

After he had gone the two girls sat down to wait for the darkness to come.

Sunlight had little or nothing to say, but it was evident that she was willing to do anything that her disguised companion suggested.

They had selected a spot to wait in that was off from the path that led to the shanty, and from which they could see the log building quite plainly.

It was a rather tedious wait, to be sure, but as the girl knew she would be well paid for it in the end, she made the best of it.

Sunlight did not appear to mind it much.

But as Indians are noted for their patience, there was nothing strange about this.

At length the two waiting girls saw the light of an oil lamp in the window of the shanty.

It was now getting dark fast.

Arietta got up and arranged the disguise she wore.

"I am going in and ask for the skin that contained the firewater, Sunlight," she said. "That will be an excuse."

"All right," nodded her companion. "Me wait here."

"I think you had better go down to the trail, Sunlight. We may have to hurry, you know."

The squaw nodded obedience.

Without a word, she took the bridles of the two burros and went off.

Then Arietta stepped out and boldly walked to the door of the shanty.

It was not closed tightly, so she pushed it open.

The talking of a lot of drunken men was all she heard, and, seeing that the opening of the door was not noticed, she stepped softly inside.

Four men sat at a rough table playing cards and the fifth lay on the floor asleep near the bound form of Young Wild West!

That was what Arietta saw when she walked into the shanty.

The man on the floor had evidently been overcome by the liquor, for at his side was a cup.

Hearing the footsteps of the girl, the card players looked around.

"What do yer want?" demanded Sandy Ike.

"Me come for skin to take back to village," the girl answered, speaking as meekly as she could.

"Well, git it, an' then git out of here. Don't bother us, 'cause this is a game of cards fur ther championship!"

Arietta made a move as though she was going to the rear of the shanty, but instead of doing so she turned toward her lover.

Our hero was looking right at her now, and when she made a sign to him and pulled some of her golden hair from beneath that which had been blacked, he gave a start.

Then she smiled and nodded to him.

The boy knew her now, and an expression of joy and satisfaction crossed his face.

Just then the man on the floor stirred and muttered something in an incoherent way.

The girl paused.

But half a minute later her chance came.

While the four men were intent upon the game of cards Arietta knelt beside Wild and severed his bonds.

No one saw what was going on, for the guard was now fast asleep.

"Hand me that rifle," whispered the boy.

The disguised girl lost no time in doing so.

But she did not venture to make a reply.

Young Wild West motioned for her to go out.

She did so, the men looking up from the game, but not noticing that she had failed to take the skin she stated she had come for.

Arietta did not go a dozen steps from the shanty.

She stood close to a tree, her revolver in her hand.

The brave girl meant to fight in case her lover got into trouble.

She could hear the harsh voices and bursts of mirth that came from the card players, but that was all.

Ten minutes passed.

Then she suddenly saw a form creep out of the doorway.

The girl's heart beat faster at that moment than it had during any time since she found that Wild was missing.

The daring young deadshot had succeeded in leaving the shanty without the knowledge of the villains!

Wild arose to his feet, pausing long enough to stretch himself, and then stepped softly in the direction of his sweetheart.

"I am glad you came, Et," he whispered, as he imprinted a kiss on the girl's forehead, notwithstanding the paint that was there. "I was getting tired of lying there with my hands and feet tied. You are a brave girl, little one."

"Oh, Wild!" was all the answer she made.

"I guess we had better find Spitfire," he went on, as he smoothed back her hair. "We haven't got to hurry so much, though, for the rascals in there are too drunk to get up from the table. It is a wonder to me how they are able to play cards."

"One of the Apache girls came with me," said Arietta, as she led the way to the stable in the rear of the shanty. "She is waiting below with the two burros we rode here. Charlie has been here, too. He shot the man they sent to demand the thousand dollars ransom of us, and he has been gone over two hours now. I told him the best thing he could do would be to go and fetch Jim and the rest here as soon as he could."

"You did exactly right, Et," Wild said. "Now for my faithful horse."

The sorrel was quickly found by the disguised girl, and then Wild led him down to the trail with his brave sweetheart at his side.

Arietta's little scouting trip had resulted very satisfactory to her, and she was more than happy.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALL HANDS IN CAMP ONCE MORE.

Cheyenne Charlie lost no time in getting back to the camp.

He did not know whether he had done exactly right or not in leaving Arietta to accomplish the rescue of Wild, but as he had agreed to do it, he kept right on, resting his horse now and then until he arrived.

His horse was pretty well tired out, but that did not deter him from getting ready to start again over the blazed trail.

They would not be able to ride very fast on account of the pack-horses.

When he told Jim, Anna and Eloise what was up they were very much surprised.

But they all seemed to think that everything was all right.

"Arietta will succeed," said Anna, confidently. "She is just like Wild in that way. When she undertakes a thing she always does it."

"Where Sunlight?" asked Yellow Flower, the squaw, of Charlie, when she saw that they were getting ready to ride away.

"She is waitin' with Arietta," retorted the scout. "You kin meet her at ther other end of ther blazed trail. I was lookin' at ther village where you live. It is quite a place, ain't it?"

"You look at village?" the squaw asked, eyeing him keenly.

"Yes, I went along ther chasm to ther right a ways, an' then I got a good view of it. It's somethin' like an ordinary Injun village, 'cause ther women was workin', an' what men I seen was loafin'. That's Injun style, all right."

Yellow Flower nodded.

"The paleface brave knows," she said. "You did not find way to get to village, did you?"

"No," and the scout shook his head, "but I reckon it wouldn't take me a great while to find ther way if I was to try real hard."

The Indian girl looked just the least bit disturbed.

"You must not look for the way," she said, slowly. "The palefaces must not go there."

"Oh, pshaw!" exclaimed the scout in disgust. "I reckon it would be all right if we was to go there. What hurt could we do ther blamed old village? You folks think you have a right to ther whole country, jest 'cause some crazy ancestors of yourn seen fit to take out from ther rest of ther tribe an' form a colony of their own. What good will ther gold that's there do you, when you can't spend it? It would be a great deal better if someone was to git hold of it what kin make use of it."

"But the medicine man will not let the palefaces have any of the gold that is in the valley," protested the Apache maiden.

"See here!" and Charlie shook his finger at her impressively. "Don't you know that medicine men are frauds? You've been around among ther whites long enough to know that, I reckon. Ther medicine men of your people always manage things so they git about everything they want without havin' to do a stroke of work for it. They are rank frauds, Yellow Flower! You hadn't oughter take no stock in sich fellers, not when one of 'em sends out a couple of gals to kill six men. If that medicine man of yourn could do half as much as he says he kin, an' makes you people believe he kin, he would be able to keep anybody from findin' ther way into ther village without havin' 'em killed."

"Never mind, Charlie," spoke up his wife. "Yellow Flower believes in her people and their ways, you know. Don't try to persuade her to anything different."

"Yellow Flower has been to the school on the reservation," spoke up the squaw.

"That's what you said once before," observed Charlie. "Then I believe you said that your ancestors went to ther valley a long while ago, an' that so many of ther men had been killed off that ther squaws had to do ther fightin' now. I reckon you ain't told us ther whole truth about this here village of yourn."

"Yellow Flower and Sunlight tell palefaces what the medicine man say tell them," was the retort.

"Oh, I reckon that's it. Well, never mind. I know there's a village ther other side of ther chasm, 'cause I've seen it with my own eyes. That's enough jest now. Come on! If everyone's ready we'll light out for a long ride."

All hands were ready, so they set out over the blazed trail to meet Young Wild West and Arietta.

Yellow Flower did not grow angry at what Charlie had said to her; on the contrary, she grew very talkative, and as she rode along she admitted to Anna that she had lived less than a year in the village.

The story she had told at first was the one they had been taught to tell any palefaces they came across, and so long as they were living under the rule of the medicine man they thought it right to do it.

She even went so far as to tell Anna and Eloise that she would get them some of the gold that was in the valley.

The squaw was riding Arietta's horse, and as she had some of the girl's clothing on she seemed to be proud of being with the palefaces, as she called them.

Our friends pushed ahead as fast as the Chinamen could keep the pack-horses going, but night overtook them before they had covered more than a third of the distance.

They kept on, however, and as the air was cooler after the sun went down, the traveling was far more pleasant.

Jim was forced to carry a lantern, however, so they could see the trail now and then, as there was no telling but that they might come to a fork somewhere that would lead the horses astray.

In this way they kept on for over three hours.

At the end of that time they heard a shout ahead of

them, and, recognizing Arietta's voice, they answered it in hearty fashion.

"Whoopee! Whoopee!" shouted Cheyenne Charlie, not caring if there was a band of hostiles or a gang of renegades to hear him.

The scout was delighted, because he knew that Arietta would not cry out in such a joyous strain if Wild was not with her.

The next moment the sorrel dashed up with our hero on his back.

"Here we are, safe and sound!" exclaimed the dashing Prince of the Saddle. "I got away without the ransom being paid, you see. Arietta did the business!"

Arietta and Sunlight were right behind him on the burros.

The brave girl had ridden part of the distance on the back of Spitfire with Wild, but she did not want to tire the horse any more than was necessary, so she mounted the lazy, long-eared beast and kept the company of the squaw.

Sunlight had decided to stick to Arietta and do just as she said.

She even declared that she would never go back to the Apache village unless the paleface maiden advised her to.

All hands were so glad to see Wild and Arietta back that there was a general handshaking all around.

Even Wing and Hop insisted on gripping the hand of our hero.

"Well," observed our hero, after awhile, "I think we may as well go into camp and wait until morning to go any further. There is a suitable place about half a mile back. Come on!"

"I reckon that will about suit my horse," retorted Cheyenne Charlie. "He's had a putty good exercisin' since ther time I started out to find you."

On the way to the camping spot both Wild and Arietta related what had occurred.

Then Charlie told his story.

While this was taking place the two Indian maidens were engaged in earnest conversation in their own language.

Sunlight was endeavoring to persuade Yellow Flower to turn from the traditions of her forefathers and stick to the palefaces.

It was not a difficult task for her to get Yellow Flower to do as she did, and when they were arranging things in the camp Sunlight came to Arietta and said:

"Squaws no like Apache medicine man any more; they do as paleface maiden say."

"All right," replied Arietta. "You can go with us, then. You are both very beautiful Indian maidens, and it may be that we will be able to find good husbands for you in a couple of honest white men. You are both old enough to marry, I should think, and if you stay in the Apache village, where the men are so scarce, you will stand little show."

The squaws nodded and looked pleased.

Then they assured her that they were both past the age of twenty.

"Well, that is just the age for a girl to get married," spoke up Anna.

"How about that, Arietta?" Charlie called out.

"Well, I have got a good three years to wait, then," was the quick reply. "But I agree with Anna. I wouldn't think of getting married under twenty."

"Nor I, either," declared Eloise.

Sunlight and Yellow Flower understood what was being said, and they seemed to enjoy it.

The camp was soon got into shape and then they had as good a supper as could well be cooked in the wilderness, after which they sat down and talked over the stirring events of the past couple of days.

Wild hardly thought that the five villains would recover from the effects of the liquor they had imbibed to come to look for him, but he did not relax any vigilance, for all that.

There might be others about who would interfere with them if they got the chance.

They kept a fire burning, however, which was more to furnish light and cheerfulness than anything else, and Wing and Hop produced a folding checker-board and began playing for a small amount of money a game, though Wild did not know it was for anything more than pastime.

They became so interested, however, and chattered in such an excited way about it that he grew suspicious.

Finally he saw Wing pass a dollar to his brother at the end of the game.

He thought it time the game was broken up, so he got ready to give them a surprise.

When they got the checkers arranged to begin a new game they began wrangling as to who should have the first move.

Then Wild drew his revolver, and, taking a quick aim, shot one of the checkers off the board.

"It is my move!" he exclaimed. "That will do for you fellows. Hop, how much money have you won from Wing?"

"Me no undlestand!" protested Hop, looking blankly at his boss.

But that was a way he had.

Young Wild West understood.

"Give him back his money, or I'll shoot off the end of your pigtail!" he cried.

Then Hop smiled blandly and handed three dollars to his brother.

"Thlee games," he said. "Wing no know how to play allee samee yaller dogee!"

CHAPTER IX.

SANDY IKE AND HIS MEN REACH THE VILLAGE.

Young Wild West had not much more than made his escape from the shanty when the men playing cards became so drowsy that they had to stop the game.

One by one they fell asleep, three of them with their heads on the table and the other sliding from his stool to the floor.

They were dead to the world, and consequently it made no difference to them just then whether Young Wild West had got away or not.

It was daylight the next morning when the man who had been lying on the floor near our hero awoke.

He looked around him in a dazed way, and it was several minutes before he realized where he was.

Then he got up and looked around.

The first thing wrong he noticed was that Young Wild West was not there.

Then he saw his still sleeping companions.

All but one had rolled to the floor by this time, and they were dead to the world.

The man who had waked up was the fellow called Sam.

He was very nervous from the effects of the peculiar liquor, and he made for a bottle that contained some of the stuff.

A stiff horn set his nerves right and then he proceeded to arouse his companions.

"Wake up, you galoots!" he cried, as he shook first one and then the other. "Young Wild West has got away while we was asleep. Hey, Ike! Wake up, won't yer?"

Sandy Ike was the first to pay any attention to him.

"Hey? What's that, Sam?" he gasped, looking at the man and rubbing his eyes. "Who's play is it? Where in thunder is my cards?"

Then he realized that he was sitting on the floor of the shanty, and, after looking around in surprise for a minute, he staggered to his feet.

Sam handed him a drink.

The villainous leader of the gang swallowed it eagerly.

Then between the two of them they aroused the others.

In a few minutes they were all something like themselves.

"So Young Wild West is gone, is he?" remarked Sandy Ike, as he went to the door and saw the sun just coming up. "By thunder! but that is mighty queer, ain't it? Mebbe Gizzle has come an' got him, boys. If he did he must have got ther thousand dollars."

Sam shook his head.

"I don't think Gizzle has been here," he said.

"Why don't yer?"

"Well, look at ther rum there is left! If he'd been here he wouldn't have left much of it."

"But if he was goin' back with Young Wild West to git ther money—say? Then he wouldn't have had time to drink."

"That's so, too. But you kin bet that Gizzle ain't been here since he went away yisterday."

The five men now went out of the cabin.

The fresh morning air made them feel better, and when they had washed their faces in the neighboring brook they began to grow hungry.

The man who usually had charge of the cooking built a fire and set about to get the breakfast.

When they had eaten something they lighted their pipes and declared that they were ready for business.

"You can bet that ther Injun gal is ther one what set Young Wild West free," said Sam, who had a dim recollection of having seen Arietta bending over our hero.

"Mebbe she did," replied Sandy Ike. "If she did I'll wring her neck fur her if I ever catch her!"

"I wonder if ther horse is gone, too?" spoke up another of the gang.

"Most likely," retorted Sam. "Young Wild West could have took his horse an' all ther rest, as fur as we was concerned. There wasn't one of us what could have stopped him, I reckon. That rum of ther Apaches is sartinly great stuff."

"Yes, an' that jest reminds me that I want another drink of it," observed Sandy Ike, grinning as though he had said something that was real smart.

"I reckon we kin all stand another drink of ther stuff," spoke up another. "There's more'n enough left fur a round, I reckon."

They found that there was, so they all had some.

They had gathered inside the shanty to drink the liquor, and as Sandy Ike handed over the cup after emptying it he happened to look out of the doorway.

Then it was that he gave a start.

He caught the least glimpse of an Indian's tufted head among the bushes.

"Boys," said he in a whisper, "an Injun is spyin' on us! It ain't a squaw this time, but a chief, 'cause I could see it by his head-dress. You fellers jest wait here! I'm goin' out to see what he's up to."

The leader of the villains went out by the rear door and worked his way around to the spot where he had seen the Indian.

He was just in time to see a receding form moving along the ledge.

A sudden thought struck Sandy Ike.

"I bet he's goin' back to ther village!" he exclaimed under his breath. "Now is my time to find out ther way to git there!"

Sandy Ike was deeply interested now.

If he could only find a way to get into the little valley that lay the other side of the chasm he would be in his glory.

There was gold there, and he was certain of it.

Cautiously he worked his way along, catching a glimpse of the Indian now and then.

Past the place where the blazed trail ended so abruptly the redskin went, and along the route Cheyenne Charlie had gone over when he first got there in search of Wild.

But the Indian did not proceed as far as the scout did in that direction.

He paused before a mass of thick vines that hung from a cliff, and, looking around as though to make sure that he was not observed, he stepped up and pulled them aside.

Sandy Ike was looking right at him at that very instant, and when he saw the redskin suddenly disappear he rubbed his hands with satisfaction.

"It's mighty easy when yer know how," he muttered. "Now, I mustn't take my eyes off that place till I gits right to it. Then I kin mark it an' go an' git ther rest of ther gang. I don't jest feel like follerin' ther 'Pache alone."

The villain was altogether too cowardly to do this.

He made his way slowly to the hanging vines, and when he stepped with three feet of the identical place where the Indian had disappeared he picked up a stone and laid it on a rock that was there.

"There! I reckon that'll mark ther spot!" he muttered, as he looked around. "But pshaw! I'd know it anyhow. There ain't no other place like it in sight."

Back to the shanty went Sandy Ike.

"Gizzle ain't got back yet, hey?" he remarked, as he looked at those present.

"No," was the reply. "Was it an Injun you seen, or wasn't it Young Wild West, or one of his friends?"

"It was an Injun, all right, an' don't yer furgit it! Boys, I've found ther way to git over to ther other side of ther chasm!"

"What!" cried the men in astonishment.

"It's a fact, boys. I follered ther Injun an' seen where he went. It's jest as easy as pie, too!"

"Hooray!" yelled Sam. "If that's ther case we won't have ter catch any more people an' hold 'em fur ransom. There's gold enough over there ter fix us all fur ther rest of our lives."

"That might be, but we don't know it fur a fact," said the man nearest him. "We only know from what them squaws slipped out one time when they brought us some meal here. They said their people didn't want money, 'cause there was gold in plenty over there, an' that they hadn't any use fur it."

"You kin bet it's there, all right!" and Sam shook his head in a positive way.

"Well, jest git ready an' we'll all go over," exclaimed Sandy Ike. "I don't know as we're apt to have a scrimmage with ther redskins over there, but it'll be jest as well if yer see that your shooters is in order."

They all made an examination of ther revolvers and rifles, and when they were sure that they were all right and loaded they said so.

"Young Wild West got away with his shooters, I see," remarked Sandy Ike, as he looked on the floor where the weapons had been placed when the boy was brought in.

"Yes, I reckon he had use fur 'em," retorted Sam. "But I'm mighty glad he didn't take a notion ter use any of 'em on me, though. He kin shoot too straight."

"Never mind Young Wild West now!" cried the leader. "Jest drop him from your minds, boys! We've got something else to think about. It may be that we kin get inter ther valley without ther redskins knowin' it, an' if we kin we'll stand a wonderful good show of gittin' at ther gold what's there."

"We'd better see to ther horses afore we go," suggested one of them.

"That's right. Hobble 'em an' let 'em have a chance to git grass an' water," said Sandy Ike.

Sam ran out and obeyed.

"Ther sorrel stallion ain't there, all right," he observed when he come back. "Young Wild West took his horse with him, an' everything else but ther saddle, which is hangin' there, an' was right over his very head."

"I reckon he'll come an' git ther saddle after we're gone," retorted one.

Five minutes later the men were moving along for the spot where the Apache had disappeared.

Sandy Ike led the way right to the spot.

"There's ther place," he whispered. "Don't look like a way to git to ther other side of ther chasm, does it?"

"Not much!" retorted Sam. "What have yer been doin', Ike, jokin' with us?"

"Oh, I reckon it ain't what yer kin call a joke," and with that the man took hold of the vines and pushed them aside.

Then a rift in the face of the cliff that was about six feet wide was disclosed.

It was open at the top, too, for the light came down very plainly.

Sandy Ike's followers were much mystified.

But they were delighted, as well, and they eagerly pushed their way into the opening.

Sam took the lead, Ike giving way to him willingly enough, it seemed.

Along the passage went Sam, the rest following, and after a few yards had been traversed he came to a slanting descent.

"We could have brung ther horses if we'd wanted ter," he remarked. "Here's ther prints of them burros' hoofs here."

This was indeed the case.

The men grew more confident when they saw the prints, for they knew that where one of the long-eared animals could go they could.

Down a winding descent they went until they found themselves in darkness.

But a faint glimmer of light ahead told them that it was all right, so after a moment's hesitation they went on.

Two minutes later they found themselves at the bottom of the chasm.

They looked up and shook their heads as they thought of what the result of a fall from above would be.

"Now which way do we go?" asked Sam.

"Foller ther hoofprints; there they are," answered Sandy Ike.

"That's right! Come on, then."

Into the mouth of a passage similar to the one they had just come down he stepped, and then up a slope.

It wound this way and that, and was so dark there that they could scarcely see their way at times.

But ten minutes from the time they entered the rift that was covered by the hanging vines they were not only on

the other side of the chasm, but the ridge that sloped down to the valley as well.

Right before them lay the Apache village.

The villains had been seen, too, for there was almost instantly considerable excitement among the squaws who were working in the fields.

"We might jest as well march right up an' make ther best of it," said Sam, who was more brave than any of the rest, it seemed. "We kin tell 'em that we've come to pay 'em a friendly visit."

"But mebbe they won't take it that way," retorted Sandy Ike, doubtfully.

"Well, you oughter remember that ther young squaws told us that they was a peaceful lot of people. If we don't do anything ter harm them they won't ter us. Come on! We've got ter take our chances on it, anyhow."

The five now put on all the boldness they could command and headed for the village, which was less than a quarter of a mile away.

A handkerchief that was something like white was found in the party, and Sam fastened it to the muzzle of his rifle and held it up as a token of peace.

The Indians were gathering in a bunch close to the biggest and most pretentious of the log huts, and when they saw the signal they appeared more at their ease.

Straight up to the crowd went the five rascals, growing bolder at every step, as they saw that the Indians showed no signs of hostility.

CHAPTER X.

WILD TELLS THE MEDICINE MAN SOMETHING.

The night passed without Young Wild West and his friends being disturbed, and a little after daybreak they were up and stirring.

"Now then, to follow the blazed trail to its end and then get into the valley and find some gold!" our hero exclaimed, after they had eaten their breakfast.

"But ther first thing I want to find is my saddle," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie. "When them fellers got Spitfire they took it, an' when you come back with him you was bareback. I was usin' Jim's all day yisterday, but now I s'pose I've got to go without for awhile."

"Not very long, either," retorted Wild. "Your saddle is in the shanty, and I guess we'll stop and get it. We won't have much trouble about it, either, I think."

"No, I reckon ther measly coyotes won't attempt to put up much of a fight. If they do I feel sorry for 'em."

Our friends reached the shanty nearly two hours after the five villains had vacated it to go over into the Indian village.

Young Wild West acted with caution at first, because he thought the men might fire on them from the shanty.

He went around and found their horses in the rear nibbling at the grass, and then, of course, he thought they must be somewhere about.

"Me go to door and find out," Sunlight said.

"All right," answered Wild. "I guess that would be a good way. If they are there they are very still."

The Apache maiden left them and boldly walked up to the door.

She knocked, and as there was no reply, she pushed it open.

A swift glance about the room told her that it was devoid of a human being.

"Nobody here!" she called out.

Then our friends came up the hill and halted before the shanty.

"I want my saddle!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie, as he dismounted and made for the door.

"You'll find it hanging on the wall, Charlie," replied Wild.

"All right."

He did find it there, and out he came with it half a minute later.

"I wonder where ther measly coyotes are?" he observed, as he proceeded to put the saddle on his horse. "Must have gone out to look for ther feller I dropped, I reckon."

"That might be," said our hero. "But one thing is certain. They didn't intend to go very far, or they would have taken their horses. The villains are not far away, you can bet on it!"

"Well, I don't know as we have any particular business with them, anyway," spoke up Jim Dart.

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Wild. "I want to get the money Sandy Ike took from me. He mustn't have that, you know."

"That's so. I forgot that you said he took all the money you had on you."

"It wasn't such an awful lot, but I am going to have it, just the same."

"I don't blame you, Wild."

"I reckon you folks would like to have a look at ther Injun village, wouldn't you?" spoke up Cheyenne Charlie just then.

"Yes!" exclaimed Arietta. "I haven't seen it yet."

"Come on, then. I'll soon have you where you kin see it."

The two squaws appeared to be rather nervous when the scout led the way along the ledge and across the end of the blazed trail.

Before they reached a point where they could look down on the valley, however, they came to the spot where the five villains had entered the winding passage and crossed under to the valley.

In their excitement Sandy Ike and his men had not rearranged the vines after they passed through.

In their eagerness they had torn them considerably, anyhow, and now part of the opening could plainly be seen.

"What's this?" Young Wild West observed, as he dismounted and stepped up to the opening.

He pulled the vines aside so he could have a good look.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "How about this, Sunlight? Here are the tracks of your burros in here. Is this the way you go to get to your village?"

"Yes, that is the way," was the reply.

"Well, there are the prints of bootheels here, too, which shows that the bad paleface men, as you have been calling them, have gone through here. I guess we may as well go, too, if that is the case."

The Apache girls looked at each other apprehensively.

"We have made up our minds to live with Arietta and her friends and do just as she says," replied Sunlight, after a pause.

"That is right!" added Yellow Flower.

"Well, then, you will go with us and explain to your people that we have not come there to harm them. If the bad men are there we will drive them out in a hurry."

"And when you come away Yellow Flower and Sunlight come, too?"

"Oh, certainly you will, if you still want to stick to us."

"They will never stick to us, never fear," said Arietta. "Sunlight and Yellow Flower are going to learn the ways of the palefaces and then they will be all right. We will take them back to the Black Hills, if we ever go there again."

"Oh, we'll go there again," Wild retorted. "I have an idea that things are booming up there now. In a couple of months, or perhaps sooner, we'll go back."

"Well, the question before us now is whether we will get through this peculiar passage or not," remarked Jim Dart.

"Go! Of course we'll go!" exclaimed our hero. "Sunlight, can we take our horses?"

"Oh, yes!" was the reply. "But lead them, and one go ahead of the other."

"All right! Come on, now! We will soon see what sort of a place the village is."

"An' run across them measly coyotes what had you in ther hut," added the scout.

As they knew they could depend upon what the two Apache girls said, our friends proceeded through the crooked passage fearlessly.

Sunlight led her burro right behind Wild, and whenever he paused she would tell him it was all right.

They reached the bottom of the chasm, crossed it and entered the passage that led into the valley.

"This is a wonderful piece of business!" Jim Dart exclaimed.

"Ther Injun girls said it was done by an avalanche," Charlie tried to explain.

"An earthquake, more likely," added Wild.

They came out in full view of the village a few minutes later, and then Sunlight pointed excitedly to a group gathered in front of the lodge of the medicine man.

Our friends looked and saw that there were white men there, and that they appeared to be perfectly at their ease.

"There's ther measly coyotes!" cried Cheyenne Charlie. "Hanged if they ain't gone an' made friends with ther Injuns!"

The moment our friends was observed by the Apaches and whites there was a sudden stir among them.

The white men flourished their weapons threateningly and the Apaches seemed to be on the verge of making a rush to meet the newcomers.

"Those fellows have managed to get very friendly with your people, Sunlight," Wild said. "See! they all want to fight us."

"My people must not fight the white men!" the girl answered. "Wait! I will go to them and tell the medicine man that the palefaces he has made friends with are bad."

"Well, it might be a good idea if you straightened things out a little."

Sunlight mounted her burro and rode straight for the village, while the rest remained at a halt.

It was not that they were afraid to go, but Wild thought it would be best not to be in a hurry about it.

He watched the movements of the crowd as the girl approached them, and it dawned upon him gradually that she was not going to get a very pleasant reception.

And so it proved.

As Sunlight rode up two braves suddenly stepped up to her and seized her.

The startled cry she uttered could be plainly heard by our friends.

Yellow Flower looked very much frightened.

"The medicine man will make a sacrifice of Sunlight!" she said. "He will have her burned on the pile of stones behind his lodge."

"No, he won't!" retorted Young Wild West. "We won't allow him to. If he tries anything like that there will be something less than twenty Apache braves left in the village. We will begin on them and clean them out, unless they surrender in short order!"

Yellow Flower looked relieved.

"Young Wild West is a great brave," she said. "He can do what he says; his tongue is not crooked."

"All right, Yellow Flower, I am glad you think so. Now, Charlie, you and I will ride over there and have a talk with them."

"All right!" said the scout.

"Jim, you stay here with the girls, so in case things turn out different from what I expect you will be able to retreat into the passage."

"I'll do that," retorted Jim.

Our hero and the scout rode off at a swift gallop toward the gathering in front of the lodge of the medicine man.

There was a strange silence among the Apaches and white villains then.

The latter knew what Young Wild West could do, and it is quite likely that the former were impressed by the boldness of the advance upon them by the two.

Both Wild and Charlie had their rifles hung over their shoulders, but they did not make a move to get them in their hands ready for use.

If there was any shooting to be done they depended upon their revolvers to do their part of it.

Wild did not halt until he was almost among the crowd. Then he saw that the majority of the Indians were squaws.

"What is the trouble here?" he called out, flashing a glance over the faces before him. "Sandy Ike, I have come for that money you stole from me! If you don't hand it over inside of ten seconds you will be a dead man!"

As quick as a flash Wild covered the villain with his revolver, while Charlie, with a shooter in either hand, watched the rest of the gang.

The Apaches seemed dismayed at this sort of a performance.

But looks of disgust crossed their faces when they saw Sandy Ike step up tremblingly and hand some money to the dashing boy on the sorrel stallion.

At this juncture an old Indian, who was in a very fancy attire and who had many feathers in his hair and strings of beads about his neck, stepped up rather timidly.

"Man steal money from you?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Wild. "He is a cowardly thief. Sandy Ike is no good! He would steal everything you have if he got the chance."

"Ther first measly coyote what denies that will git a bullet!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie, as he noticed that a couple of men acted as though they were going to speak.

Then they remained silent.

The gaudily attired Apache looked at the five men and shook his head.

"They say you no good, and you say they no good!" he remarked, shaking his head in a puzzled way.

"Well, you will find out which is which before long, chief. Are you the medicine man?"

"Yes, me big medicine man. I heal the sick, make the rain and——"

"Well, never mind telling us what you can do—or what you can't do, rather. Where is Sunlight?"

"Sunlight must be punished for showing the palefaces the way to the valley."

"No, she mustn't be punished, either. If you don't let her go free something will happen to you, Mr. Medicine Man! There are only twenty of you now, and I guess I can drop half a dozen myself, if it comes to a quick fight. You don't want to lose any more of the men of your tribe, do you?"

It was hard to understand just what the expression that came over the face of the medicine man really meant.

"Sunlight shall not be harmed," he said.

"All right. Now, I don't suppose you have any objections if we camp near your lodge, have you?"

"The paleface boy can do as he thinks best. He is a great brave, and he has an eye like the eagle and a hand that is steady."

"Thank you for the compliment. Now, just see to it that Sunlight is not harmed. If she is there will be no medicine man here very long!"

Then, while Charlie kept his eye on the five white men,

Wild turned and rode back a little way and beckoned for Jim to come on with the rest.

They came almost immediately, and when the Indians saw Yellow Flower with them they looked at her angrily.

The queer religion the medicine man had been teaching them caused them to hate her for being in the company of the palefaces.

Wild noticed their looks, and he knew quite well what they meant.

"Don't none of you interfere with Yellow Flower!" he called out so all could hear him. "We did not come here to make trouble for the Apaches, and we are going away before another sun comes and goes!"

CHAPTER XI.

SOME QUEER DOINGS.

Sandy Ike gave the word to his men and they withdrew to the rear of the lodge as soon as the rest of our friends came up.

There was a group of tepees there, and it was to them they had been assigned for their present quarters by the medicine man after they had managed to make him believe they had come there for no harm.

Sandy Ike was not a very bright man, but he had sense enough to observe that the medicine man did not believe Young Wild West any more than he did him.

That set him to thinking that it would be a good idea to try and convince the old Apache that they were honest, and Young Wild West and his friends not.

One of the braves who could speak English well happened to come around just then.

Sandy Ike called him.

The redskin came over.

"See here," the villain began, "if you let them people stay here they will clean out everything you've got here. Them two squaws you sent over with ther firewater fur us has gone an' told 'em that there's lots of gold here, an' that's what they've come after. That boy with ther long hair is a bad one, an' don't yer forgit it! He made me give that money to him 'cause he tried to rob me yisterday, an' I got away from him. He hollered out to me that he would take ther money away from me ther first time he met me, an' he done it. He kin shoot awful straight, an' quick, too, so there was no use in me refusin' to give it to him. He'd have shot me stone dead afore I could have done a thing, an' then there'd have been a time of it. Ther chances is that he might have got downed, but some more of us would have went, too, so what's ther use of it. Livin' is better than dyin', any time."

"That is what the great medicine man teaches us," nodded the brave. "The men are few here, and we must save them to keep up the new branch. Our religion is the only religion! We believe in the Great Father of the Happy

Hunting Grounds, but we believe that a sacrifice must be made to Him whenever things do not go right. The medicine man has said that the squaw Sunlight must be burned on the altar to-night, and she must be burned or our religion is lost!"

He pointed to a pile of stones not far distant, and Sandy Ike and his followers nodded approval.

"Of course ther squaw must be burned!" the villain said. "We'll help ther medicine man to do it, too."

"Not me!" spoke up Sam. "I ain't in sich business as that. I don't believe in killin' unless yer can't help yourself."

"You'll believe in somethin' afore yer git out of this scrape, mebbe," retorted the leader a little angrily.

"Most likely," was the rejoinder.

It was evident that Sam wished he was any place but there.

The Apache soon walked away and joined his own kind.

But Sandy Ike knew that he had impressed him a great deal by what he had said.

"We may as well take it easy here," he said. "Now, if Gizzle was only here with us I'd feel first rate."

"I reckon Gizzle must have got his medicine," spoke up Sam.

"Who from?"

"Some of Young Wild West's gang, most likely."

"Well, if he did it is too bad."

As the lodge of the medicine man was between them and the spot our friends had selected to pitch their camp, neither could see the other.

Sandy Ike and his men did not care about looking at Young Wild West's party much, either.

They were satisfied to be where they were for the present.

About half an hour after the brave they had been talking with had left them they were surprised to see the medicine man himself, calling toward them.

The villains arose to their feet and saluted him in great shape.

As they were trying to curry favor with him, they were ready to do anything that would be apt to please him.

The saluting did please him wonderfully.

"I have come to say much to the paleface men in little words," he said, as he paused before them and looked around as though he was afraid he would be heard by someone else.

"Go ahead an' say it, great chief!" retorted Sandy Ike, making another elaborate bow.

"If the palefaces will take the religion of the Apaches who have left the reservation and marry the squaws who want husbands they can live here always and be great men."

"That's a putty good idea, I reckon. What do yer think of it, boys?"

All but Sam nodded approvingly.

"I ain't had time to think," he said.

"If the palefaces will agree to take our religion they shall

have a lodge to live in, and they shall be fed of roast antelope," went on the medicine man.

"An' how about some firewater?" spoke up Sandy Ike.

"They shall have firewater, too."

"Then we'll agree."

"The paleface chief has spoken wisely. Come!"

The five men followed him around to the front of the lodge.

They saw that Young Wild West and his friends had formed a camp on an open piece of ground near a fringe of tall trees, and also that they appeared to be taking things rather comfortably.

"I'd give a whole lot if we could manage to wipe out that gang," said the leader of the villains, in a whisper.

"Mebbe we kin git ther Injuns ter help us do it after we've j'ined 'em in their religion business."

The medicine man led the men along until he came to a hut that had the appearance of being unoccupied.

Then he came to a halt.

"This for you," he said to Sandy Ike.

"All right," was the grinning reply. "I reckon that ain't so bad."

The door was opened for him, so Ike stepped in and stood looking out.

He saw that our friends were watching what was taking place with no little interest.

"I reckon we've struck a landslide by comin' here!" he exclaimed under his breath. "We kin stay until we git hold of a pile of gold an' then skip out. What fools these Injuns are! They beat anything I ever seen!"

The medicine man went on, and at each unoccupied hut he came to he stopped and assigned it to one of the men.

The last to be placed was Sam.

"I wonder what's goin' ter happen next?" he thought. "Hang it all! I don't want no squaw for a wife! I don't want no wife, anyhow. I never yet had one, an' I don't intend ter."

He watched what the medicine man did with no little anxiety.

Presently he saw him lead a good-looking squaw to the hut that had been turned over to Sandy Ike.

"Well, I'll be shot!" he gasped, when he saw his leader receive the squaw with a polite bow. "Ike has gone plumb crazy! But ther rest of ther men will do ther same as he does, 'cause they ain't got enough brains ter do their own thinkin'. Well, afore I take on of them copper-colored wimmen fur a wife I'll quit this hut an' go over ter Young Wild West an' take my chances."

The man nodded in a manner that told that he meant to do as he said.

Five minutes later another squaw was led to the second man, and then the third received his wife to be.

Sam did not wait for the fourth wife to be delivered.

He watched his chance and left the hut, going around by the back way.

Then he lost no time in getting to the camp of our friends.

"Say!" said he, breathlessly; "I'm only a rascally man, Young Wild West, but I can't stand anything like that! Let me stay with yer, won't yer?"

"Let me see," retorted our hero, looking at him sharply. "You are the fellow who was against killing anyone, unless it was done to save yourself, I believe."

"Yes, that's me. I am Sam—just plain Sam."

"And you don't like the way your friends are doing?"

"No, I won't take no wife, 'cause I don't want none."

The girls looked at the man with no little interest."

He seemed to be a peculiar sort of a villain to them.

"Wild," said Arietta, "let the man stay with us. I really believe he is not as bad as the rest."

"Oh, I am of that opinion, too," was the reply. "He is not as bad as the rest."

The face of Sam lighted up.

Then he told them just what was in the wind.

"Ah!" exclaimed our hero. "They want to strengthen their cause, do they? Well, I must say that they are poor judges, or they would not choose such subjects to convert to their religion. However, I suppose they are as good morally as the medicine man is."

"They must be a bad lot, 'cause they are goin' ter burn ther squaw what was with you folks."

"They are, eh!" cried Wild. "When?"

"To-night one of ther Injuns told us. They are goin' to burn her alive on a pile of stones back of ther shanty ther medicine man lives in, which they call an altar, or somethin' like that."

"Well, I rather think they won't burn anyone on the altar. What do you say, boys?" and Wild turned to Charlie and Jim.

"I reckon now while we're able to hold a shooter they won't!" retorted the scout.

"That's what's the matter!" exclaimed Jim.

Yellow Flower had heard and understood the conversation.

The girl was much alarmed.

"They make sacrifice of Sunlight," she said.

"No, they won't!" answered Arietta. "We won't let them."

Wild turned to her and asked her what the ceremony would be when the white men took the religion of the fanatical Apaches.

"They must dance with their bare feet on hot stones," was the reply. "Then they must kneel three times to the sun and say what the medicine man tells them to."

"That ain't so bad," chuckled Cheyenne Charlie. "I kin jest enjoy seein' them measly coyotes dancin' on hot stones. Great gimlets! I reckon they're gittin' ready for it now! They're carryin' wood to start a fire; an' some of ther squaws is luggin' stones up to ther front of ther lodge."

"Right you are, Charlie," nodded our hero. "Now, I guess we'll see something that is funny."

The medicine man had found out before this that Sam had quit the hut he had been assigned to and taken up his

quarters with the crowd they considered to be their enemies.

But he made no move to induce him to come back and join his former companions.

"I reckon he thinks four will be enough to dance on ther hot stones," the scout said, when Sam spoke up and said it was strange that they did not come after him.

"It is not that altogether," spoke up Jim. "They don't want to bother with us, I guess."

This was probably the cause.

The medicine man did not want to lose any more of his men if he could help it.

Meanwhile our friends were watching the proceedings with interest.

Stones were being scattered over the ground in a space of perhaps eight feet square.

When the square was filled wood and brush was piled upon them, then the medicine man appeared, wearing the skull of a buffalo on his head and a big string of rattlesnake skins hanging from his neck.

He danced and bowed before the pile for a couple of minutes, and then turning to the sun, knelt three times before it.

"They are sun worshippers, I guess," Jim observed.

"Yes, their new religion is nothing more than the old that their ancestors believed in four hundred years ago," retorted Wild. "That medicine man no doubt thinks he is making a great impression upon us."

Just then the medicine man lighted the pile and soon it was blazing merrily.

Our friends watched the scene with interest.

None of the white men could be seen, as they were in the huts they had been assigned to.

It was not until the pile of brushwood had burned to ashes that they appeared.

And when they were led out by their brides they were without their boots.

"They're barefooted, all right!" said Cheyenne Charlie, a broad grin covering his face. "Now you'll see some fun."

Four squaws now sprang to the hot ashes and began to sweep it from the stones with rude brooms.

They did it quickly so the heat that had got into the stones could not get out.

When the stones were bared each candidate for the religion of the fanatics was seized by two braves and led up to the hot dancing place.

The expressions on the faces of the villains were anything but pleasant ones.

Sam began to grin.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

The medicine man now picked up a sort of drum and began beating upon it.

Then every man, woman and child in the village hurried to the spot and formed a ring around the four candidates.

"I guess we can venture a little closer," remarked Young Wild West. "We may as well see the performance right while we are at it."

"I reckon that's so," retorted Cheyenne Charlie. "There ain't much to be afraid of in that gang. If they git their danders up an' start to clean us out I'll jest clip over ther medicine man, an' then that'll wind it up, about."

All hands now moved up closer to the circle.

Just as they got near enough to see all that was going on the ugly-looking medicine man ceased beating the drum for a minute and commanded the four men to step on the hot stones and begin to dance.

They had been divested of their weapons, as our friends could see, so there was no chance for them to put up a fight, even if they desired to.

But they hesitated about obeying the command.

They knew they were going to have the skin burned from the soles of their feet, and they did not like the thoughts of it.

However, when the braves in charge of them pushed the villains up they hopped upon the stones and began dancing like mad.

Then the medicine man beat time for them with the drum.

It was certainly torture for the four men.

The Apaches would have stood it without a murmur, but with them it was different.

"Ow-wow!" yelled Sandy Ike, the first to let out his feelings in a vocal way. "Let us git off ther hot stones, won't yer, chief?"

"Go on and dance!" was the reply, and then the braves and squaws began singing a chant.

The victims of the strange religion began yelling in unison now.

Every time one of them made a break to get through the circle he would be forced back in a hurry.

If they landed on their hands and knees they got up with astonishing quickness.

The girls turned away from the spot as the howls of the four became piteous.

Then all hands went back to the camp.

"I'm awful glad I had sense enough ter git out of ther gang," observed Sam, shaking his head. "I reckon I'll walk a straight path after this."

The dancing was kept up until the four villains could no longer keep at it.

When they fell from sheer exhaustion they were dragged from the hot stones by the braves attending them and carried to their huts.

But their feet were so badly burned that it would be several days before they would be able to walk upon them.

However, the medicine man was not done.

He went to the hut of Sandy Ike and compelled him to crawl out and bow three times to the sun.

Then he led the squaw who had been assigned to him over and made them join hands.

He then went through a jargon that was scarcely intelligible to those of his own race and wound up by declaring them man and wife.

Then he went to the others and did the same thing.

That wound up the ceremonies.

Young Wild West thought it now about time to interfere in behalf of the girl who was condemned to be burned to death.

"I'll go and have a talk with that fanatic," he said. "Charlie, you and Jim come a little way and be on the lookout for danger. I hardly think they will put up a fight, but if they do just be ready for them."

The two nodded and followed the daring boy over to the lodge, in front of which the medicine man was standing, going through a sort of chant before retiring to remove his head-dress and robes.

"See here!" exclaimed Young Wild West, walking up and slapping the fellow on the shoulder. "Do you know one thing, old man? I want you to send Sunlight to our camp inside of ten minutes!"

The medicine man shook his head as though to frighten him, and, becoming exasperated, Wild knocked the buffalo skull from his head.

"We won't stand any more fooling," he went on, leveling his revolver at him. "If Sunlight is not in our camp, unharmed, inside of ten minutes I am going to shoot daylight through your ugly carcass. We came here to do no harm, but if you are going to cut up like this we will have to straighten things out. Do you understand what I say?"

"The great medicine man understands what the paleface boy says," was the reply. "But the palefaces are wrong. They will wither and die in the sun for coming here! They will dry up and blow away like the leaves from the trees."

"Never mind about that. Do as I say, or you will be ready for burial in a very few minutes."

The old Indian was very mad, but he was trembling with fear, too.

He flung off his finery and started from the spot, Wild keeping him covered in the meantime.

Into a hut he went close by, and the next minute he came out leading Sunlight by the arm.

Then he looked up at the sun and mumbled over something and released his hold upon the girl.

She at once ran toward Wild.

"Go on back to the camp, Sunlight," our hero said. "I guess you are not going to be burned alive to-night."

"Arietta's lover is a great brave!" she answered. "Sunlight will never forget him."

"That's all right. You stick to us and you will be far better off than you will be if you stay here among such a gang of crazy Apaches."

The Indian girl was very glad to get back to the girls.

The medicine man now hastened to his lodge, so Wild went back to the camp, followed by his two partners.

"Well, I guess it is not hard to manage this crowd," our

hero said. "They must be composed of all the cowards they could pick out of the tribe. No wonder they are fanatics! They don't know anything else."

Wild gave the order to Wing and Hop and they started a fire and proceeded to get dinner ready.

They had a good supply of eatables still, so all they needed was water.

"One of you redskins come here an' git us some water!" called out Charlie to a group of the Apaches near the lodge.

It was astonishing to see how quickly one of them came for the pail he held in his hand.

"You'd better go with him, Charlie," suggested Anna. "Suppose the Indians were to put poison in the water?"

"That's right. I'll go with him."

The scout followed the Apache to a neighboring spring and waited for him to fill the pail.

Then he came back, none of the rest offering to interfere in the least way with them.

The dinner was cooked and eaten just as though there were no such thing as an Indian village within a hundred miles of them.

Their coolness had great effect on the Apaches.

Probably it had more to do with their successful way of managing things than anything else.

"When are yer goin' away from here?" asked Sam, as he lighted his pipe, after having eaten the best meal he had tasted in days.

"Before dark, I guess," replied Wild.

"Will yer let me go with yer?"

"Certainly. "We won't go and leave you to the same fate as your companions got. You objected to it, and they did not."

"Thank yer, Young Wild West."

"Oh, never mind thanking me."

"Will yer let me make a suggestion?"

"Yes. Go ahead."

"There's plenty of gold here, an' ther Injuns don't have no use for it."

"So we have heard."

"Why don't yer make 'em give yer some of it afore yer go away, then?"

"That would be a good idea, Sam. You are all right at making suggestions, it seems."

"Well, I ain't speakin' fur myself. I only thought that you people is entitled to about anything that kin be had, that's all."

"Well, if we happen to get hold of any gold you can rest assured that you will have a share of it."

"Thank yer, Young Wild West."

"There you go thanking me again. It isn't necessary to thank me, Sam."

"I can't help it."

"Very well. Then there is an excuse for you. Hello! here comes a message from the medicine man, I guess. One of the Apaches just came out of the lodge and he is coming this way."

Sure enough, one of the older braves came up, bowing respectfully as he got there.

"Well, what do you want?" asked Wild.

"The great medicine man says the sun will not set till the bad palefaces go away with Sunlight and Yellow Flower," was the reply.

"Then he considers that we are the bad palefaces, eh?"

"Everything will wither in the sun and die!" went on the Indian, not noticing what the boy said.

"See here!" exclaimed our hero. "If the great medicine man wants us to go away he must give us each a present of a bag of gold. It must be as big as this," and he picked up a stone that must have weighed a pound.

The Apache nodded.

Then he bowed low and hastened back to the lodge.

There were just eleven in the party, counting the two Indian maidens and Sam, and ten minutes later they saw just that number of squaws approaching, each with a weighty buckskin bag.

"Thunder!" ejaculated Sam. "Ain't I glad I come ter you people, though?"

The squaws came up and laid down the bags of gold.

Then they bowed and quickly retired.

"One for each of us!" exclaimed Wild. "Now, each of you examine what you take and make sure that they are not fooling us."

"Ther weight is there, so there's no foolin' about it," retorted Charlie, as he picked up one of the bags.

And they found that it was pure gold in all of them.

"I guess this trip has panned out pretty well," observed Wild. "We'll go back to the ranch, and maybe some other time we'll take a notion to follow the blazed trail again."

The Indians watched them in silence as they mounted their horses and rode away.

As they entered the passage the two squaws looked back upon the place they were leaving and sighed.

They were going to make a change, and it was all for the best.

There is not much more to add to this story.

Sam got his horse from those in the rear of the shanty and accompanied our friends to the next town.

Young Wild West and his friends reached the ranch they were stopping at without adventure, and thus ends the story of the blazed trail and Arietta as a scout.

THE END.

Read "YOUNG WILD WEST'S FOUR OF A KIND; OR, A CURIOUS COMBINATION," which will be the next number (129) of "Wild West Weekly."

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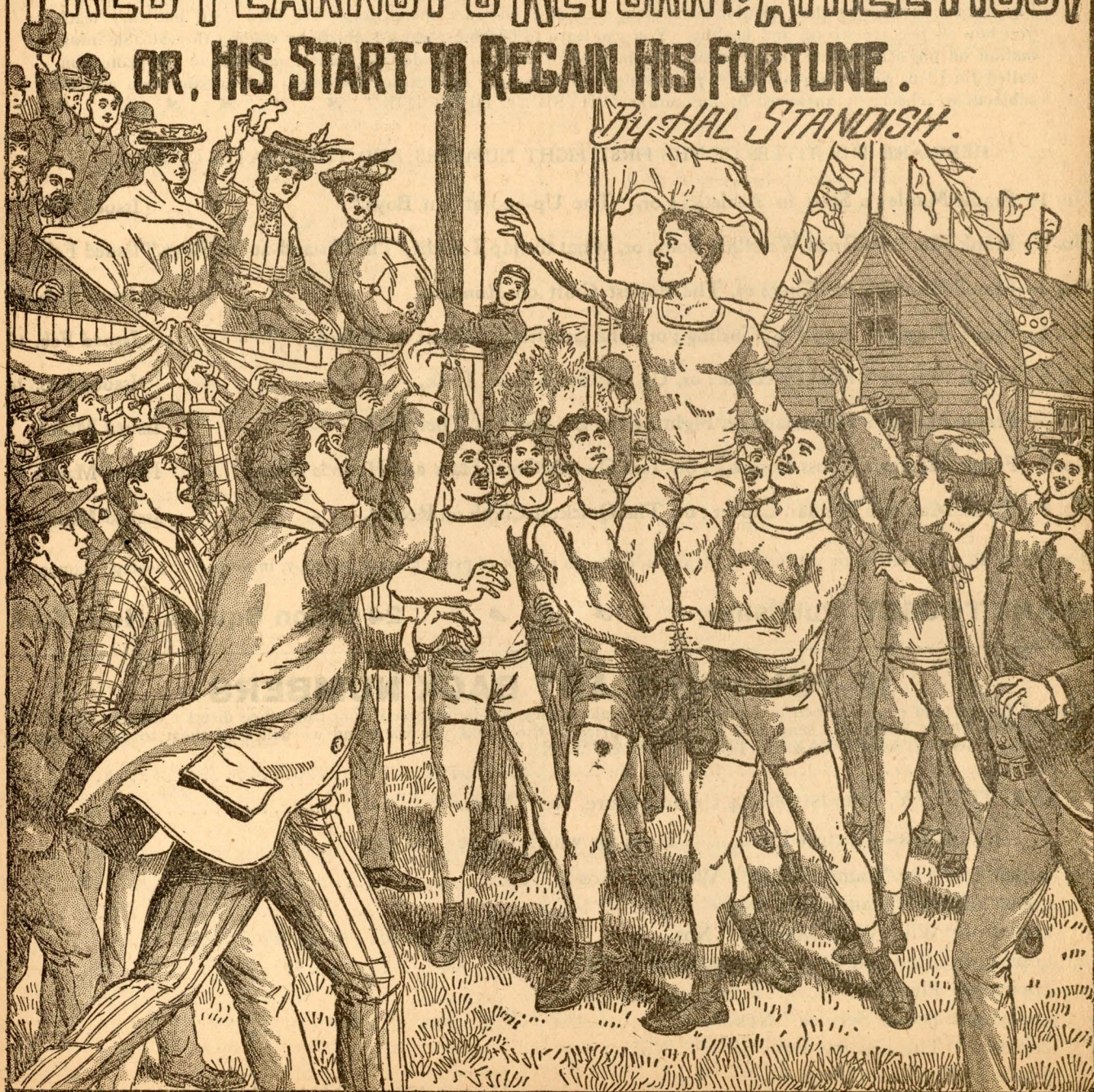
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.... " " THE YOUNG ATHLETE'S WEEKLY, Nos.....
.... " " Ten-Cent Hand Books, Nos.....

Name.....Street and No.....Town.....State.....